

# **Young people's writing: Attitudes, behaviour and the role of technology**

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## Executive summary

Writing is an important issue in the UK today. While children's and young people's writing standards steadily improved until 2006, levels have not increased in recent years. Writing is much more than just an educational issue – it is an essential skill that allows people to participate fully in today's society and to contribute to the economy.

Previous research into the teaching of writing and effective writing strategies has mainly focused on the formal types of writing taught in schools. However, today's society writing takes many forms, including texting, instant messaging, blogging and emailing. The research evidence about these new forms of writing in the UK is fragmented and inconclusive. In particular, there is a lack of research looking at how much young people write, the different forms of writing that they engage in and their confidence in using these different forms of writing.

Since relatively little is known about young people's views about writing in the UK, the key objectives of this survey were: *to explore how much young people enjoy writing, what type of writing they engage in, how good at writing they think they are and what they think about writing.*

**3001 pupils aged 9-16** from England and Scotland completed an online survey in May 2009. There was an almost equal gender split, with 48.6% of boys and 51.4% of girls taking part. The percentage of pupils who receive free school meals (20.2%), which is frequently used in educational research as a crude indicator of socio-economic background, was higher in this survey compared to the national average for primary and secondary pupils.

Some of the key findings of this survey are:

- 75% of young people said that they write **regularly**. **Technology-based formats** were most frequently written. For example, 82% of young people wrote text messages at least once a month, 73% wrote instant messages (such as messages on AIM or MSN), and 63% wrote on a social networking site. Of non-technology based writing, 77% wrote notes or answers in class or for homework at least once a month followed by 52% writing notes to other people.
- 56% of young people said they had a profile on a **social networking site**, such as Bebo or Facebook. 24% said that they have their own **blog**. While frequently vilified in the media as 'dumbing down' young people's literacy, this research shows that technology offers different writing opportunities for young people, which is seen in a link between blogging and (self-reported) writing ability and enjoyment of writing. For example, young people who write on a blog were much more likely than young people who do not write on a blog to enjoy writing in general (57% vs. 40%) and to enjoy writing for family/friends in particular (79% vs. 55%). Young people with a blog (61%) as well as young people with a profile on a social networking site (56%) also displayed greater confidence, believing themselves to be good writers. Blog owners and young people with a social networking profile were also more prolific writers than their counterparts. They held more positive attitudes towards writing and computer use, and viewed writers more favourably.
- Owning a **mobile phone** does not appear to alter young people's enjoyment of writing, their writing behaviour or their attitudes towards writing.
- Most young people said they **used computers** regularly and believed that computers are **beneficial** to their writing, agreeing that a computer makes it easier for them to correct mistakes (89%) and allows them to present ideas clearly (76%). Overall, nearly 60% of young people also believe that computers allow them to be more creative, concentrate more and encourage them to write more often.

- Young people are ambivalent about their **enjoyment of writing**. 45% of young people surveyed said that they enjoy writing. However, enjoyment of writing is related to the type of writing being done. When young people were asked to rate their enjoyment of writing for family/friends and their enjoyment of writing for school separately, some differences emerged. Young people enjoyed writing for family/friends more than they enjoyed writing for school, with over two-thirds of young people enjoying writing for family/friends and only half enjoying writing for schoolwork. Most young people agree that they enjoy writing more when they can choose the topic (79%).
- Echoing US research (Pew Internet, 2008), just under 9 in 10 young people see writing as an **important skill** to succeed in life, but this means that a sizeable minority (12%) do not consider it an important life skill.
- When asked how **good they think they are at writing**, we found that there was an almost equal split between those who said that they are either very good or good (52%) and those who felt that they could be better or were not very good (45%). Those who responded that they are a 'very good' or 'good' writer were then asked to select from a list the **reasons** why they think that they are good at writing. Most young people felt that they were a good writer because they use their imagination (39%), know how to type (36%) and spell (33%). By contrast, young people who didn't believe that they were good writers were more likely to emphasise the transcriptional aspects of writing. For example, the most common reason why young people think that they are not good writers is that they are not very good at writing neatly (23%), followed by them not enjoying writing very much (22%), not being very good at spelling (21%) or at checking their work (20%).
- In line with governmental figures, which show that girls outperform boys in writing, there were consistent **gender differences** throughout this survey. Boys lagged behind girls in more than just their writing skills. Boys did not enjoy writing as much as girls (38% vs. 52%), either for family/friends or for schoolwork. Boys were also more likely to rate themselves as 'not very good writers' than girls (48% vs. 42%) and to emphasise the lack of technical skills when explaining their self-perceived ability. Boys also held more negative attitudes towards writing. For example, boys were more likely than girls to agree with statements that writing is boring (57% vs. 41%) and that writing is more for girls than for boys (60% vs. 43%). However, boys held more positive attitudes towards computers, being more likely than girls to believe that computers are beneficial to writing. However, girls are nearly twice as likely as boys to have a blog (33% vs. 18%).
- There were also consistent **age differences** in this survey, with a dip in enjoyment of writing, writing behaviour and attitudes towards writing at ages 11-14 (Key Stage 3). Generally, pupils aged 9-11 (Key Stage 2) enjoyed writing, both for family/friends and for schoolwork. They wrote mostly traditional forms, such as short stories, poems and letters. They held positive attitudes towards writing and viewed writers in a favourable light. At ages 11-14 (Key Stage 3) these behaviours and attitudes plummet and turn negative, recovering again in pupils aged 14-16 (Key Stage 4).
- The relationship between enjoyment of writing, writing behaviour, attitudes towards writing and socio-economic status, assessed by proxy using **free school meal (FSM) uptake** as an indicator, is complex. Pupils who receive FSM in the present study were not more or less likely than their more privileged counterparts to enjoy writing or to write regularly. There was also no relationship between socio-economic background and enjoyment of writing, writing behaviour, linking writing to success, views of writers, computer use, or attitudes towards computers. However, pupils who do not receive FSMs rated themselves as better writers than pupils who receive FSMs. The lack of confidence in writing of FSM pupils is also reflected in their attitudes towards writing,

with more FSM pupils than non-FSM pupils agreeing with the statement that they have trouble deciding what to write.

In summary, this research provides us with an up-to-date insight into young people's attitudes towards writing. Most young people write regularly and young people write technology-based materials, such as text and instant messages, most frequently. While owning a mobile phone does not appear to alter young people's writing behaviour, having a profile on a social networking site or having a blog is connected to enjoyment of writing and confidence in writing. Young people today use computers regularly and believe that computers are beneficial to their writing.

We believe it is paramount that the school curriculum reflects and utilises writing forms that young people enjoy and engage with, in order to demonstrate that writing is more than a compulsory task: it is an essential life skill.

## Young people and writing – an introduction to this survey

There has been long-standing concern about literacy achievements in England, both with respect to pupils as well as adults. Of particular concern are writing skills. While writing standards in the UK steadily improved until 2006, writing standards have recently plateaued. Of even greater concern are the writing skills of boys (e.g. Daly, 2003; Kingdon & Kassen, 2007). For example, Key Stage 1 teacher assessment results (DCSF, 2009a) showed that the gender gap is still very pronounced, with girls continuing to outdo boys; 87% of girls reached level 2 (expected standard) in writing compared to only 75% of boys. This gap continues into later years of schooling, with 85% of girls compared to 72% of boys reaching level 5 or above at Key Stage 3 (DCSF, 2008a).

Despite concerns about writing standards in schools declining, writing has undergone a fascinating cultural change over the past decade, with authors becoming celebrities and celebrities becoming authors. This ‘celebritisation’ of writing has changed the way many young people view writing. Alongside this, the rise of social networking sites and texting on mobile phones has increased the amount of time that children spend writing, although this is accompanied by concerns about the form and style young people are using.

While there has been research into the teaching of writing and effective writing strategies (e.g. Andrews, Torgerson, Low et al., 2006), the majority of this research has focused on the formal types of expository writing taught in schools. However, writing in today’s society can take many forms including texting, instant messaging, blogging and emailing. The research evidence about such forms of writing is far more fragmented and inconclusive. Indeed, what is perhaps conspicuous in its absence in the UK is research that outlines the extent to which young people engage in writing, the different forms of writing that they engage in and their confidence in using the different forms of writing.

Other countries, such as New Zealand, Australia and the US, have conducted attitudinal research in the form of surveys, and it is perhaps timely that a similar survey is conducted in the UK. The most recent and relevant survey has been conducted by Pew Internet (2008). This survey looked at the formal and informal types of writing that young people do and the family support they get for each.

In line with our *Young People’s Self-Perceptions as Readers* research (Clark, Osborne and Akerman, 2008), which showed that children and young people do not see reading emails, blogs and internet sites as reading, research by Pew Internet (2008) shows that young people (at least in the US) write a lot, but they do not think of their emails, instant and text messages as writing. Yet, they believe that good writing is an essential skill for success and that more writing instruction at school would help them. At the heart of this is a discrepancy in perception between informal and formal writing types and the degree to which teens see informal types of writing as writing.

Standards in writing are consistently behind those in reading. There is also some fragmented evidence to suggest that young people’s confidence in writing is much lower than in reading (e.g. Kellett and Dar, 2007). Children in Kellett and Dar’s study viewed writing as the most public of all the literacy activities they engaged in, and saw school writing as a painful process of endless drafts, scrutinised by adults and publicly displayed on classroom walls.

Yet, writing is more than just an educational issue – it is a necessary skill that allows people to participate fully in society and contribute to the economy. With the continuing growth of the DCSF-funded project ‘Everybody Writes’, and the recent launch of the ‘Every Child a Writer’ campaign, the National Literacy Trust (NLT) believes now is an ideal time to explore what young people in the UK think about writing.



## Objective

Since relatively little is known about young people's views about technology and writing in the UK, the key objectives of this survey were to explore:

- *How much young people enjoy writing*
- *What types of writing they engage in and how often*
- *How good a writer they think they are and what they think about writing*
- *The role of technology in young people's writing*

These key objectives were further broken down into a number of questions. These included the following:

- Is there a difference between enjoyment of writing for family/friends and enjoyment of writing for school? Does enjoyment differ according to gender, socio-economic background and age? How does the use of technology relate to enjoyment of writing?
- In what types of writing do young people engage in and outside of school? Does this differ according to gender, socio-economic background and age, and is there a relationship with technology use?
- How do young people rate themselves as writers? What are the reasons they provide for their self-assessment? Is self-reported writing ability related to gender, socio-economic background and age? How does the use of technology relate to self-perceived ability?
- What do young people think about writing? Do their attitudes towards writing differ according to gender, socio-economic background and age, and are attitudes towards writing related to technology use?

## Methodology

An invitation to participate in this online survey was sent out in our NLT-wide newsletter at the beginning of February. Schools were invited to express their interest to participate. Overall, 43 schools, mainly from England and Scotland, expressed an interest. A link to the online survey alongside a guidance note for teachers was emailed to the schools at the beginning of May.

The online survey consisted of 25 questions, exploring young people's background, writing behaviour, perceived ability and attitudes. Due to the complexity of the questions and some concepts, the decision was made to restrict the age range of participating pupils to upper KS2 (9-11 years) and higher. The questions are reproduced in *Appendix A*. It took an average of 15 minutes for young people to complete the survey.

It should be noted that about 300 Scottish pupils took part in the survey. The educational system in Scotland differs quite markedly from the one in England, with pupils remaining at primary school for seven years. Then, aged 11 or 12, they start secondary school. However, all the pupils that participated from Scottish schools were between the ages of 12 and 13. No differences were found in terms of writing behaviour and attitudes between English and Scottish pupils of the same age, and therefore the data here are presented for the sample as a whole. Although the term 'key stage' only refers to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, key stage data will be used to compare pupils of similar age in England and Scotland.

Overall, 3001 pupils from 12 primary and 12 secondary schools participated in an online survey between 2 May and 22 May 2009. Data were analysed using PASW (formerly SPSS) 17. Three statistical tests were used predominantly to explore background differences in the main



variables: independent t-tests, ANOVAs and chi-square tests of independence. Any result for which statistical significance is reported was significant at the conventional significance level of 0.05. This means that the result would be likely to occur by chance only five times in every 100 cases. Where multiple items are compared simultaneously, a Bonferroni correction is applied (significance level / n of items), which lowers the significance level to prevent statistical errors as a result of chance. Please note that for the sake of readability, we do not cite actual statistical information; we only refer to significance in the body of the text.

However, some judgement is needed about the educational significance of statistically significant findings. This is particularly the case when sample sizes are high, as in the present study, which means that many of the results will reach statistical significance.

## Sample characteristics

There was an almost equal gender split in the sample: boys = 48.6% (N = 1446) and girls = 51.4% (N = 1528). *Table 1* shows that the majority of pupils were 12 and 13 years old. To investigate the impact of age, three broad categories were identified according to Key Stages – KS2, KS3 and KS4. The KS2 category (24%, N = 712) refers to pupils aged 7-11, KS3 (56%, N = 1672) refers to pupils aged 11-14, while KS4 (18%, N = 540) applies to pupils aged 14-16.

The percentage of pupils who receive free school meals (FSM), which is frequently used in educational research as a crude indicator of socio-economic background, was 20.2%, with 20.5% of primary and 18.6% of secondary pupils receiving free school meals. The percentages of FSM uptake in this study are higher than the national average for primary and secondary pupils (17% and 14%, respectively; DCSF, 2009b). When asked how they would describe their ethnic background, most pupils said that they were White British (78.3%, N = 1900). The second and third most frequent ethnic categories in this sample were Asian/Asian British Pakistani (2.8%, N = 68) and Asian/Asian British Indian (2.7%, N = 65).

**Table 1: Age**

	Per cent	N		Per cent	N
<b>8</b>	2.2	65	<b>13</b>	31.3	915
<b>9</b>	4.9	143	<b>14</b>	12.5	366
<b>10</b>	7.0	204	<b>15</b>	3.2	95
<b>11</b>	11.7	341	<b>16</b>	0.6	16
<b>12</b>	26.7	781			

## Young people's use of technology

82% of young people say that they own a mobile phone, whereas 78% either own a computer (47%) or have access to one at home (31%). Roughly in line with previous research (e.g. Ofcom, 2008), over half of young people (56%) have a profile on a social networking site, such as Bebo or Facebook<sup>1</sup>. Nearly a quarter (24%) report that they have their own blog, while nearly a sixth (14%) say that they have their own website. For a breakdown of technology by background characteristics please see *Appendix B*.

<sup>1</sup> The percentage of young people in this study who say that they have a profile on a social networking site is slightly higher than the 50% reported by Ofcom in 2009 in their study of 15 to 24-year-olds.

## Young people's enjoyment of writing

- The sample was divided in their enjoyment of writing. While 45% enjoyed writing either very much or quite a lot, 55% of young people did not enjoy writing. Girls enjoyed writing significantly more than boys. Similarly, KS2 and KS4 pupils enjoyed writing significantly more than KS3 pupils. There was no relationship between enjoyment of writing and FSM uptake. Blog writers enjoyed writing more than young people who do not write on a blog.
- When young people were asked to rate their enjoyment of writing they do for family/friends and their enjoyment of writing for school separately, more pupils enjoyed writing for family/friends than they enjoyed writing for schoolwork. Girls enjoyed writing both for family/friends and for schoolwork more than boys. KS2 and KS4 pupils also enjoyed writing both forms of writing significantly more than KS3 pupils. Blog owners enjoyed writing for family/friends more than their non-blogging peers.

The sample of young people was divided when asked in a general question whether they enjoyed writing (see *Table 2*). Nearly half of young people (45%) said that they enjoyed writing either very much or quite a lot, while 55% reported that they do not enjoy writing.

Overall, girls enjoyed writing significantly more than boys. Similarly, KS2 and KS4 pupils enjoyed writing significantly more than KS3 pupils. While socio-economic background, in terms of free school meals (FSM) uptake, has been found to be significantly related to reading enjoyment (e.g. Clark and Akerman, 2006), there was no significant relationship between enjoyment of writing and FSM uptake in the present survey.

Blog owners indicated that they enjoy writing significantly more than non-blog owners. There was no relationship between enjoyment of writing and mobile phone ownership. Although more young people who have a profile on a social networking site say that they enjoy writing than those who do not have such a profile, these differences were not statistically significant.

However, when young people were asked to rate separately their enjoyment of writing for family/friends and their enjoyment of writing for school, some interesting differences emerged (see *Table 2*). Although responses to enjoyment of writing for family/friends were moderately related to responses to enjoyment of writing for school, *Table 2* shows that young people enjoyed writing for family/friends more than they enjoyed writing for school, with over two-thirds of young people enjoying writing for family/friends and only half enjoying writing for schoolwork.

When asked about enjoyment of writing for family/friends versus writing for school, a significantly greater proportion of girls than boys enjoyed writing both for family/friends and for schoolwork. KS2 and KS4 school pupils also enjoyed writing either for family/friends or for school significantly more than KS3 pupils. Overall, the difference in percentage points between boys and girls was greater for writing for family/friends than it was for writing for schoolwork. Similarly, the difference in percentage points between KS2, KS4 and KS3 pupils was greater for enjoyment of writing for family/friends than it was for schoolwork. There were no differences in enjoyment of writing for family/friends or for school as a result of FSM uptake.

Again, blog owners were significantly more likely to enjoy writing for family/friends when compared to non-blog owners. There was no relationship between mobile phone ownership and enjoyment of writing for family/friends. Although a greater proportion of young people who have a profile on a social networking site say that they enjoy writing for family/friends compared with those who do not have such a profile, these differences were not statistically significant. Similarly, there was no relationship between any of the three forms of technology and enjoyment of writing for schoolwork.

**Table 2: Types of enjoyment of writing by demographic background and technology use**

	General enjoyment of writing		Enjoyment of writing for family/friends		Enjoyment of writing for schoolwork	
	Enjoy %	Don't enjoy %	Enjoy %	Don't enjoy %	Enjoy %	Don't enjoy %
<b>All young people (N = 3001)</b>	45.2	54.8	69.8	30.2	53.3	46.7
<b>Boys (N = 1446)</b>	37.6	62.4	61.8	38.2	50.0	50.0
<b>Girls (N = 1528)</b>	52.4	47.6	77.0	23.0	56.1	43.9
<b>KS2 (N = 712)</b>	56.1	43.9	75.8	24.2	68.8	31.2
<b>KS3 (N = 1672)</b>	34.9	65.1	65.6	34.4	48.2	51.8
<b>KS4 (N = 540)</b>	55.7	44.3	72.0	28.0	63.3	36.7
<b>FSM (N = 590)</b>	43.4	56.6	67.4	32.6	48.7	51.3
<b>Non-FSM (N = 2196)</b>	45.6	54.4	71.0	29.0	52.4	47.6
<b>Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)</b>	45.5	54.5	71.3	28.7	50.4	48.6
<b>Non-mobile phone owners (N = 541)</b>	45.0	55.0	68.9	31.1	54.1	45.9
<b>SNS Users (N = 1680)</b>	47.2	52.8	73.3	26.7	49.2	50.8
<b>Non-SNS users (N = 1310)</b>	44.1	55.9	68.0	32.0	55.3	44.7
<b>Blog owners (N = 720)*</b>	56.6	40.5	79.3	20.7	54.9	45.1
<b>Non-blog owners (N = 2160)</b>	40.0	60.0	55.3	44.7	52.5	47.5

(\* indicates that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05 between the categories; SNS refers to social networking site)

## Young people's self-perceived writing ability

- Young people were ambivalent about their own writing ability. There was an almost equal split between those who rated themselves to be 'very good' or 'good' writers and those who believed that they 'could be better' or are 'not very good' writers.
- Girls rated themselves as significantly better writers than boys. KS4 also believed that they were better writers than KS2 and KS3 pupils. Similarly, pupils who do not receive FSMs rated themselves as better writers than pupils who receive FSMs. Blog owners in particular as well as young people with a profile on a social networking site reported to be significantly better writers when compared with their counterparts.
- When those who rated themselves to be very good or good writers were asked to indicate why they think so, the majority of young people said that they are good writers because they use their imagination and they know how to type and spell. By contrast, the most common reasons why young people think that they are not good writers is that they are not very good at writing neatly, followed by them not enjoying writing very much, not being very good at spelling and not being very good at checking their work.

Young people were asked how good they think they are at writing. *Table 3* shows that there was an almost equal split between those who said that they are either 'very good' or 'good' and those who felt that they 'could be better' or were 'not very good'.

In line with previous research (e.g. Pajares and Valiante, 1999), girls judged themselves to be better writers than boys. KS4 pupils were significantly more likely to rate themselves to be good writers than either KS2 or KS3 pupils. In line with historical national attainment figures (DCSF, 2008b), which show that pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds have lower writing attainment than pupils from more privileged backgrounds, non-FSM pupils in the present study reported to be better writers than FSM pupils.

Blog owners in particular as well as young people with a profile on a social networking site reported to be significantly better writers when compared to their counterparts. There was no relationship with mobile phone and self-reported writing ability.

**Table 3: Self-reported writing ability by demographic background and technology use**

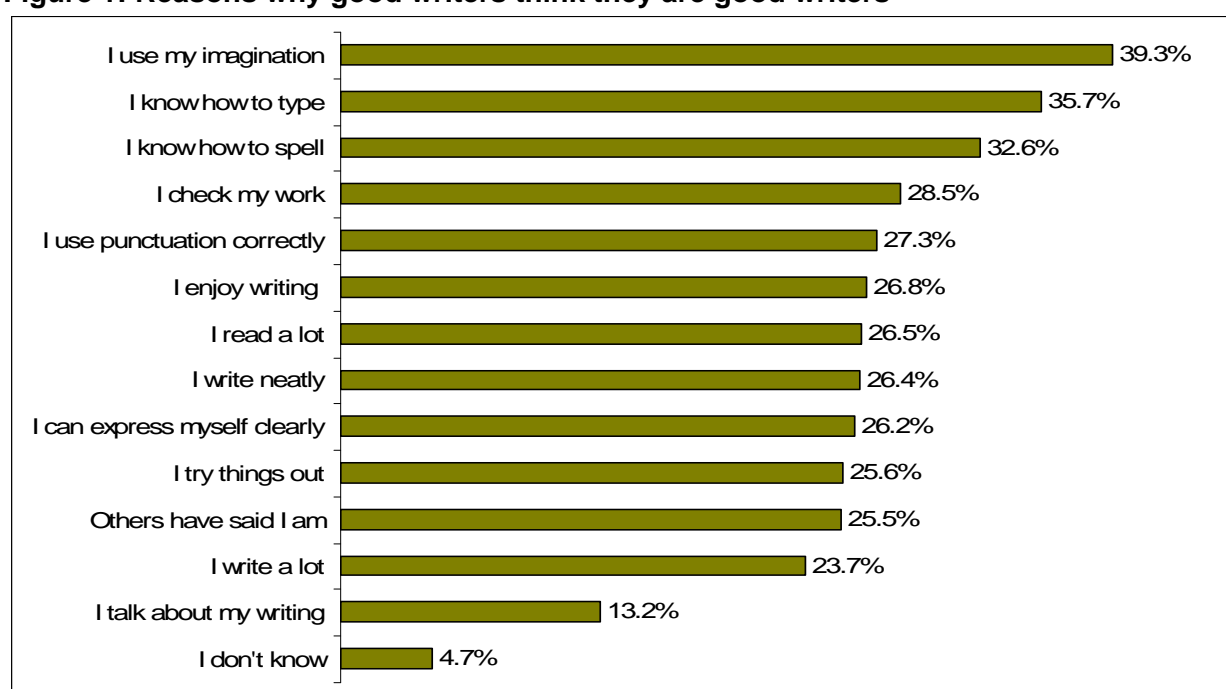
<i>How good do you think you are at writing?</i>				
	<i>Very good %</i>	<i>Good %</i>	<i>Could be better %</i>	<i>Not very good %</i>
<b>All young people (N = 3001)</b>	13.1	38.8	33.2	11.4
<b>Boys* (N = 1446)</b>	11.5	37.2	34.2	13.6
<b>Girls* (N = 1528)</b>	14.2	40.5	32.3	9.3
<b>KS2 (N = 712)</b>	15.1	38.8	32.2	13.9
<b>KS3 (N = 1672)</b>	9.8	40.3	35.1	14.8
<b>KS4 (N = 540)</b>	22.6	35.6	30.8	8.0

<b>How good do you think you are at writing?</b>				
	<b>Very good %</b>	<b>Good %</b>	<b>Could be better %</b>	<b>Not very good %</b>
<b>FSM (N = 590)</b>	13.5	31.4	38.8	16.3
<b>Non-FSM (N = 2196)</b>	19.2	39.4	33.3	8.1
<b>Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)</b>	13.4	40.2	33.2	10.9
<b>Non-mobile phone owners (N = 541)</b>	12.6	37.4	36.7	13.3
<b>SNS users (N = 1680)*</b>	19.3	37.1	32.5	10.5
<b>Non-SNS users (N = 1310)*</b>	13.1	33.8	37.6	15.5
<b>Blog owners (N = 720)*</b>	20.1	40.6	31.3	8.0
<b>Non-blog owners (N = 2160)*</b>	12.3	35.0	37.1	15.6

(\* indicates that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05 between the categories; SNS refers to social networking site)

What is particularly interesting is how different the reasons are for young people who think that they are good writers and those who think they could be better. Those who said that they are 'very good' or 'good' writers were then asked to select from a list the reasons why they think that they are good at writing. *Figure 1* shows that most young people felt that they were a good writer because they use their imagination and they know how to type and spell. Only a few said that they are good writers because they talk about their writing.

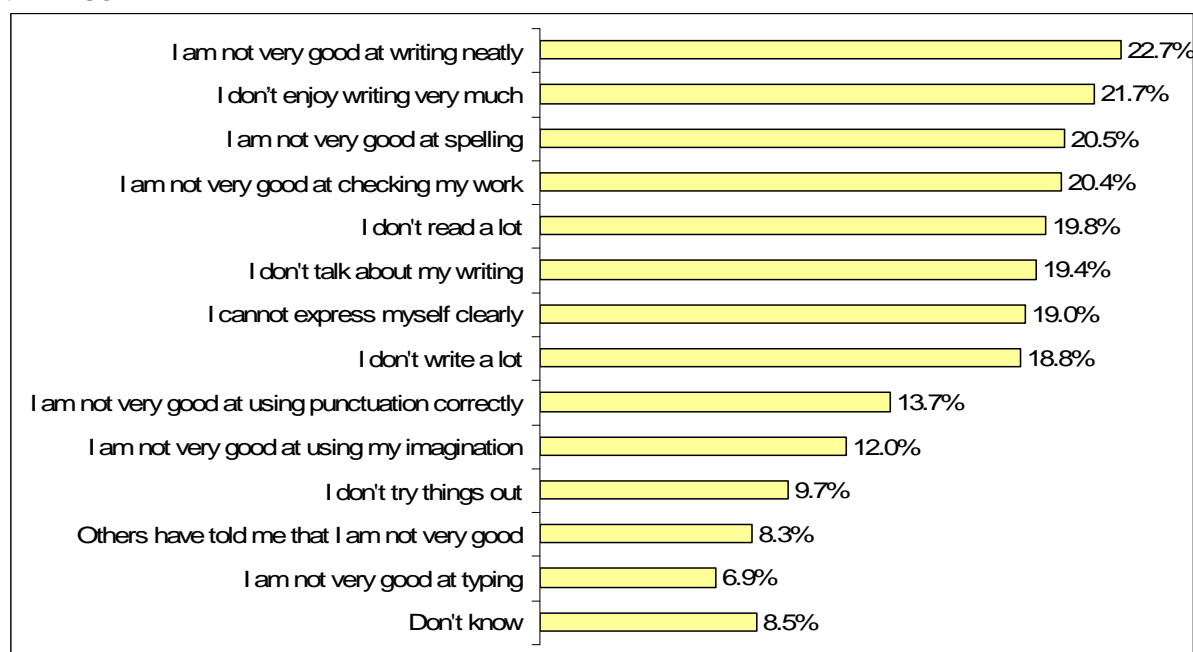
**Figure 1: Reasons why good writers think they are good writers**



(Based on N = 1,469 – More than one answer was possible, so percentages do not sum to 100)

Figure 2 shows that the reasons given by young people on why they think they are not good writers or why they could be better are very different from the reasons given by good writers. The most common reason why young people think that they are not good writers is that they are not very good at writing neatly, followed by them not enjoying writing very much, not being very good at spelling or at checking their work. Only a small percentage said that they are not very good writers because they are not very good at typing or because other people have told them so.

**Figure 2: Reasons why young people who do not think of themselves as good writers think so**



(Based on N = 1,265 – More than one answer was possible, so percentages do not sum to 100)

There were numerous gender and age differences in the reasons given for not being good at writing (see *Appendix C* for more detailed information). Significantly more girls than boys said that they are good writers because they use their imagination, they know how to use punctuation correctly, they can express themselves clearly, they check their work and they write neatly. Similarly, a greater proportion of KS4 than KS3 and KS2 pupils believed that they are good writers because they use their imagination, they know how to use punctuation correctly, they can express themselves clearly and they check their work. By contrast, more KS2 than KS3 and KS4 pupils say that they are a good writer because they write neatly.

A greater proportion of boys than girls said that they are not very good writers because they are not very good at writing neatly, they don't write a lot and because they don't enjoy writing. Similarly, significantly more KS3 and KS4 pupils than KS2 pupils believed that they are not very good writers because they do not use their imagination, they don't write a lot and because they don't enjoy writing. Conversely, more KS2 than KS3 and KS4 pupils said that they are not very good writers because they are not very good at spelling, punctuation and typing. KS2 pupils were also more likely than older pupils to say that they are not very good writers because they don't write neatly.

## Young people's writing behaviour

- 75% of young people write regularly. More girls than boys say that they write regularly. A greater proportion of KS2 and KS4 pupils also say that they write regularly compared with KS3 pupils. There was no relationship between writing regularly and FSM uptake. More blog owners and those with a social networking site say that they write regularly compared with their counterparts.
- Technology-based types of writing, such as text messages, instant messages and writing on social networking sites, were engaged in most frequently within a month. Notes or answers in class/for homework were the most frequently written non-technology type of writing, followed by notes to other people. Postcards were written least frequently in a month.
- Girls wrote a greater range of formats at least once a month compared with boys. KS3 and KS4 pupils are more likely to write technology-based formats than KS2 pupils. However, KS2 pupils are more likely to write traditional forms of writing than older pupils. Generally, there is a dip in writing frequency of non-technology based formats at KS3.
- Pupils who write on blogs or on a social networking site are more prolific writers than those who do not engage with these types of formats. There were no significant differences between pupils who use a mobile phone and those who do not in their writing behaviour.

### Frequency with which young people write

When asked whether they write regularly, three-quarters of young people (75.4%) said that they do so compared to a fifth (19.1%) who say that they do not. More girls than boys say that they write regularly (81.3% vs. 69.0%, respectively). More KS2 pupils also say that they write regularly (80.2%) compared with KS3 (64.3%) and KS4 pupils (72.8%). Similarly, more blog owners (82.1%) and those with a social networking site (79.6%) say that they write regularly compared with pupils who do not write on a blog (64.4%) and those who do not have a social networking site (67.7%). There were no differences in the extent to which young people write regularly based on FSM uptake or mobile phone ownership.

### The types of formats young people write

Another area we wanted to investigate was the types of writing that young people engage in both in and outside of school. To explore this, young people were asked to indicate what types of formats they engage in at least once a month from a list of 18 possible forms of writing. See *Appendix D* for a table outlining the frequency with which pupils wrote each of the 18 types of format at least every day, two to three times a week, once a week, once month, rarely or never. These 18 different forms of writing included writing done at home or at school, and requiring access to a computer and the internet or not.

*Table 4* outlines the frequencies in percentages with which each form of writing is done at least once a month, and shows that technology-based types of writing, such as text messages, instant messages and writing on social networking sites, were engaged in most commonly within a month. Notes or answers in class and for homework were the most frequently written non-technology type of writing, followed by notes to other people. Postcards were least frequently written in a month.



**Table 4: Writing of a range of formats at least once a month by demographic background**

	<i>All young people (N = 3001)</i>	<i>Boys (N = 1446)</i>	<i>Girls (N = 1528)</i>	<i>KS2 (N = 712)</i>	<i>KS3 (N = 1672)</i>	<i>KS4 (N = 540)</i>	<i>FSM (N = 590)</i>	<i>NFSM (N = 2196)</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Text messages</b>	81.9	<b>75.4</b>	<b>87.9</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>89.8</b>	80.1	82.7
<b>Notes or answers in class/for homework</b>	77.0	<b>72.6</b>	<b>80.9</b>	76.1	77.2	77.6	74.9	78.2
<b>Instant messages (e.g. AIM)</b>	73.1	<b>66.0</b>	<b>79.8</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>67.7</b>	<b>78.9</b>	72.7	74.6
<b>Emails</b>	67.0	<b>61.5</b>	<b>72.0</b>	<b>54.6</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>76.8</b>	66.6	68.2
<b>On a social networking site</b>	62.5	<b>54.7</b>	<b>70.0</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>63.1</b>	<b>68.4</b>	61.5	63.8
<b>Notes to other people</b>	52.3	<b>40.1</b>	<b>63.8</b>	53.0	51.9	51.9	54.9	51.9
<b>Short stories</b>	48.6	<b>42.3</b>	<b>51.3</b>	<b>60.7</b>	<b>42.5</b>	<b>47.3</b>	50.4	48.1
<b>Essays</b>	43.4	39.8	41.5	<b>34.1</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>38.8</b>	<b>44.5</b>
<b>Letters</b>	32.7	<b>28.0</b>	<b>35.1</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>28.2</b>
<b>Song lyrics</b>	32.2	<b>25.7</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>37.9</b>	<b>27.1</b>
<b>A diary/journal</b>	31.8	<b>19.5</b>	<b>38.3</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>26.3</b>
<b>Blogs</b>	31.5	<b>26.7</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>38.3</b>	33.9	31.9
<b>Reports</b>	30.9	32.0	32.5	42.8	29.5	33.3	35.5	32.4
<b>Poems</b>	29.9	<b>26.2</b>	<b>35.9</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>31.2</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>30.1</b>

	<i>All young people (N = 3001)</i>	<i>Boys (N = 1446)</i>	<i>Girls (N = 1528)</i>	<i>KS2 (N = 712)</i>	<i>KS3 (N = 1672)</i>	<i>KS4 (N = 540)</i>	<i>FSM (N = 590)</i>	<i>NFSM (N = 2196)</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Newspaper or magazine stories	29.4	29.7	30.2	36.0	26.2	25.4	<b>40.6</b>	<b>18.8</b>
Reviews	29.3	27.9	27.7	<b>35.5</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>29.9</b>	27.7	26.7
Plays/screenplays	24.2	24.4	25.9	<b>36.5</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>21.8</b>
Postcards	16.7	17.1	16.2	17.9	12.3	12.9	14.4	14.3

*(Figures in bold indicate that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05 between the pairs)*

In a month, girls wrote a greater range of formats than boys (see *Table 4*). Overall, a significantly greater proportion of girls than boys wrote the following formats at least once a month: text messages, notes in class, instant messages, emails, on a social networking site, notes to other people, short stories, letters, song lyrics, in a diary/journal, on a blog and poems.

Similar differences in writing behaviour also existed with respect to age (see *Table 4*). Compared with KS2 and KS3 pupils, KS4 pupils are the most prolific writers, particularly of technology-based formats, such as text messages, emails and on a social networking site. Nearly 9 in 10 KS4 pupils said that they write text messages at least once a month compared with 6 in 10 KS2 pupils. Similarly, nearly 8 in 10 KS4 pupils wrote instant messages and emails at least once a month compared with 5 in 10 KS2 pupils. Overall, a greater proportion of KS4 pupils than KS2 pupils wrote the following formats at least once a month: text messages, instant messages, emails, on a social networking site, essays and on a blog. By contrast, a significantly greater proportion of KS2 than KS4 pupils write short stories, letters, song lyrics, in a diary/journal, poems, reviews and plays/screenplays at least once a month.

What is perhaps particularly interesting with respect to age is that there is a dip in writing for most types of formats, apart from technology-based ones, at KS3. Writing of non-technology based formats appears to be highest at KS2, falling dramatically at KS3, and recovering again at KS4.

*Table 4* also shows that there were some significant differences between pupils who receive FSM and those who do not in the frequency with which they engage in certain types of writing at least once a month. *Table 4* shows that while there were no significant differences in terms of technology-based formats, such as text messages and emails, a greater proportion of pupils who receive FSM than non-FSM pupils write letters, song lyrics, in a diary/journal, poems, newspaper/magazine stories and plays/screenplays at least once a month. By contrast, a greater proportion of non-FSM pupils say that they write essays at least once a month.

Technology in the lives of children and teenagers has been much vilified in the media in recent years, with recurring stories of children or teenagers using text message ‘speak’ in essays and exams, and technology interfering with young people’s writing behaviour. However, echoing US research (Pew Internet, 2008), *Table 5* shows that compared to their counterparts, owning a mobile phone has no relationship with the extent to which young people write numerous genres at least once a month. Although we did not examine the content of young people’s text messages and the degree to which text message ‘speak’ may affect writing, text messaging behaviour *per se* does not appear to alter the degree to which young people engage in writing a number of different writing formats.

**Table 5: Writing a range of formats at least once a month by mobile phone ownership**

	<i>All young people (N = 3001)</i> %	<i>Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)</i> %	<i>Non-mobile phone users (N = 541)</i> %
<b>Notes or answers in class/for homework</b>	77.0	75.9	76.4
<b>Notes to other people</b>	52.3	51.9	52.0
<b>Short stories</b>	48.6	47.8	48.9
<b>Essays</b>	43.4	43.1	43.9
<b>Reports</b>	32.7	32.5	32.3

	<i>All young people (N = 3001)</i> %	<i>Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)</i> %	<i>Non-mobile phone users (N = 541)</i> %
<b>Poems</b>	32.2	32.3	33.1
<b>Letters</b>	31.8	31.3	31.3
<b>Newspaper or magazine stories</b>	30.9	30.8	30.9
<b>Song lyrics</b>	29.9	28.7	30.4
<b>A diary/journal</b>	29.4	28.7	28.3
<b>Reviews</b>	29.3	29.0	30.1
<b>Plays/screenplays</b>	24.2	24.0	22.9
<b>Postcards</b>	16.7	16.2	16.8

While the previous table has shown that owning a mobile phone does not appear to alter young people's writing behaviour, the following table shows that there is a relationship between having a profile on a social networking site or having a blog and writing behaviour. Consistent with US research (Pew Internet, 2008), *Table 6* compares the writing behaviour of young people who have a profile on a social networking site with young people who say that they do not have such a profile. The table shows that social networking site users are significantly more likely to write notes to other people, short stories, letters, song lyrics and to write in a diary/journal compared with young people who do not have a social networking site profile.

**Table 6: Comparison between the writing behaviour of young people with and without a social networking site profile, and between young people who own blogs and those who do not**

	<i>Social networking site users (N = 1680)</i> %	<i>Non -social networking site users (N = 1310)</i> %	<i>Blog owners (N = 720)</i> %	<i>Non-blog owners (N = 2160)</i> %
<b>Notes or answers in class/for homework</b>	79.2	76.9	79.3	77.2
<b>Notes to other people</b>	62.1	48.4	60.8	49.9
<b>Short stories</b>	55.3	42.1	60.1	42.9
<b>Essays</b>	43.0	44.4	43.9	44.0
<b>Letters</b>	37.8	30.1	41.4	31.2
<b>Song lyrics</b>	34.7	22.7	42.5	25.6

	<i>Social networking site users (N = 1680) %</i>	<i>Non -social networking site users (N = 1310) %</i>	<i>Blog owners (N = 720) %</i>	<i>Non-blog owners (N = 2160) %</i>
<b>A diary/journal</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>23.7</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>24.4</b>
<b>Reports</b>	32.1	34.7	32.4	33.3
<b>Poems</b>	32.0	32.2	<b>44.8</b>	<b>27.4</b>
<b>Newspaper or magazine stories</b>	30.6	30.6	34.8	30.3
<b>Reviews</b>	29.1	31.2	<b>39.6</b>	<b>29.8</b>
<b>Plays/screenplays</b>	28.2	24.0	<b>34.8</b>	<b>24.5</b>
<b>Postcards</b>	16.0	16.5	16.7	15.9

*(Figures in bold indicate that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05 between the pairs)*

Similarly, *Table 6* also compares the writing behaviour of young people who are blog owners with those who are not, and shows that blog owners are significantly more likely to write an array of formats compared with young people who do not have a blog, including notes to other people, short stories, letters, song lyrics, poems, reviews, plays/screenplays and in a diary/journal. Therefore, blog owners appear to do more creative writing (short stories, lyrics, plays/screenplays and poems) than young people who do not own blogs.

## Young people's attitudes towards writing

- Young people hold ambivalent attitudes towards writing. 49% of young people agreed that writing is boring, while 51% disagreed. However, most young people agreed that they enjoy writing more when they can choose the topic.
- Girls hold more positive attitudes towards writing than boys. Also, KS2 pupils are more positive towards writing compared with KS3 and KS4 pupils. Overall, KS3 pupils hold more negative attitudes towards writing than KS2 and KS4 pupils. Socio-economic background only had a weak relationship with attitudes towards writing. Non-FSM pupils agreed more with the statement that writing is more fun when they can choose the topics than FSM pupils, who agreed more with the statement that it is easier to read than to write than non-FSM pupils. Blog owners and social networking site users endorsed more positive attitudes towards writing than their counterparts.
- A link between writing and future success is acknowledged by most young people. Nearly 9 in 10 indicate that writing is important to succeed in life. There were no statistically significant differences in terms of demographic background or technology use and ratings of importance.

In addition to enjoyment of writing, self-reported writing ability and writing behaviour, we also wanted to explore what young people think about writing. The online survey therefore also contained 10 questions designed to explore young people's attitudes towards writing.

Young people generally had ambivalent attitudes towards writing (see *Table 7*). 8 in 10 young people agreed that writing improves with practice and that writing is more fun when they can choose the topics themselves. 6 in 10 young people also agreed that they like what they write and that it is easier to read than it is to write. However, nearly half of young people also agreed that writing is boring, reflecting a similar split in enjoyment of writing, and only a third agreed that they would like to have more time to write in school.

There were only two statistically significant differences in the extent to which boys and girls endorsed certain attitudes towards writing (see *Table 7*). Boys were statistically more likely than girls to agree with the statements that writing is boring (57% vs. 41%) and that girls enjoy writing more than boys do (60% vs. 43%).

Again, age seems to have the greatest relationship with attitudes towards writing compared with the other two background variables, with KS2 pupils holding more positive attitudes towards writing than their older counterparts. What is of interest is that KS3 pupils appeared to hold the most negative attitudes towards writing compared with KS2 and KS4 pupils. *Table 7* shows that KS3 pupils were more likely to agree that writing is boring than KS2 and KS4 pupils. KS3 pupils were also more likely than KS2 or KS4 pupils to agree with the statement that girls enjoy writing more than boys do. By contrast, KS2 pupils were significantly more likely than KS3 pupils to agree with statements that their writing improves with practice, that they wish they had more time to write at school, that they like what they write and that pupils who write well get better marks.

There were also only two statistically significant differences in the extent to which FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils held certain attitudes towards writing. FSM pupils were statistically more likely than Non-FSM pupils to agree with the statement that writing is more for girls than boys and that they have trouble deciding what to write.

**Table 7: Agreement with statements about writing by young people's demographic background and technology use**

	<i>Writing is boring</i>	<i>Writing improves with practice</i>	<i>Compared to others I am a good writer</i>	<i>I wish I had more time to write in school</i>	<i>Girls enjoy writing more than boys</i>	<i>I like what I write</i>	<i>Good writers get better marks</i>	<i>I have trouble deciding what to write</i>	<i>Writing is more fun when I can choose the topic</i>	<i>It is easier to read than to write</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
All young people (N = 3001)	49.4	80.5	51.9	30.2	51.5	62.1	61.3	59.0	79.0	64.7
Boys (N =1446 )	<b>57.2</b>	80.8	50.1	32.0	<b>60.2</b>	62.2	60.9	59.8	77.7	66.3
Girls (N = 1528)	<b>41.4</b>	80.7	50.9	30.6	<b>43.4</b>	61.9	62.8	58.2	80.3	62.6
KS2 (N = 712)	42.6	85.6	52.7	41.3	41.6	71.9	69.8	60.3	83.2	66.0
KS3 (N = 1672)	59.9	77.3	50.2	26.4	58.4	57.9	52.4	57.7	77.9	63.3
KS4 (N = 540)	48.0	80.1	50.8	35.7	47.8	63.8	63.2	59.4	80.1	64.7
FSM (N = 590)	51.7	79.5	49.4	28.3	<b>61.6</b>	64.1	59.7	<b>65.2</b>	78.4	64.4
Non-FSM (N = 2196)	48.2	81.0	52.3	31.2	<b>46.4</b>	59.3	54.6	<b>54.6</b>	80.8	66.4
Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)	52.1	82.0	48.7	29.1	50.4	62.3	62.6	61.0	80.4	64.4
Non-mobile phone owners (N = 541)	47.3	78.5	53.3	31.8	52.5	62.0	60.7	57.0	78.1	64.1
SNS Users (N = 1680)	<b>41.5</b>	80.4	<b>57.3</b>	29.3	51.0	<b>67.6</b>	61.3	<b>53.7</b>	<b>85.3</b>	63.7
Non-SNS users (N = 1310)	<b>57.9</b>	80.8	<b>46.5</b>	33.9	52.0	<b>55.4</b>	61.2	<b>65.8</b>	<b>76.5</b>	65.7
Blog owners (N = 720)	<b>37.8</b>	82.3	<b>57.5</b>	<b>38.9</b>	49.7	<b>75.6</b>	63.9	<b>37.9</b>	<b>86.9</b>	62.7
Non-blog owners (N = 2160)	<b>58.7</b>	79.2	<b>43.4</b>	<b>26.4</b>	53.3	<b>52.8</b>	58.8	<b>68.6</b>	<b>61.1</b>	66.7

(Figures in bold indicate that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05)



*Table 7* also shows that blog owners and social networking site users endorsed more positive attitudes towards writing than their counterparts. Young people with a social networking site profile were significantly more likely than those with no such profiles to agree that compared with others they are good writers, that they like what they write, and that writing is more fun when they can choose the topic. By contrast, young people who do not have a profile on a social networking site were more likely than those with one to agree that writing is boring and that they have trouble deciding what to write.

Similarly, *Table 7* shows that young people who do not own a blog were significantly more likely than blog owners to agree that writing is boring and that they have trouble deciding what to write. By contrast, blog owners were significantly more likely than their counterparts to agree that compared to others they are a good writer, that they wish they had more time to write in school, that they like what they write, and that writing is more fun when they can choose the topic.

### Linking writing and success

Most young people acknowledge a link between writing and future success. Nearly 9 in 10 (87.7%) young people indicated that writing was important to succeed in life, with 46.3% indicating it is very important and 41.4% indicating that it is important. Less than 2% of young people feel that it is not at all important to succeed in life.

Attitudes towards writing and ratings of importance were highly and positively related ( $r = 0.654$ ), indicating that young people who held positive attitudes towards writing also rated writing as more important to succeed in life.

There were no statistically significant gender, age or socio-economic differences in ratings of the importance of writing to succeed in life. Similarly, there were no statistically significant differences in terms of mobile phone ownership, having a profile on a social networking site or owning a blog and ratings of importance.

## Young people's views of writers

- 40% of young people have a favourite writer, who is most frequently an author, film writer or poet. Girls were more likely than boys to say that they have a favourite writer. Similarly, blog writers were more likely to have a favourite writer than young people who do not write on a blog.
- When asked what types of formats a writer writes, most young people believed that they write short stories/books, poems or plays/screenplays. There were no differences in terms of demography and perceptions of what a writer writes.
- Two-thirds of young people believed that someone who writes is creative, intelligent and will do well in life. Only one-fifth believed that someone who writes hasn't got any friends or is boring. Girls tended to have more favourable views of writers than boys. KS2 and KS4 pupils viewed writers more favourably than KS3 pupils. Blog users and young people with a social networking profile also had more favourable views of writers than those who do not write on a blog or have a social networking profile.

When asked whether they have a favourite writer, only 40% of young people said that they do. Of those who had a favourite writer, 70% said that their favourite writer was an author, followed by 15% who said that it was a songwriter, 7% who said it was a film writer and 3% who said it was a poet.

Girls were significantly more likely than boys to say that they have a favourite writer (50.9% and 38.6%, respectively). There were no significant differences in terms of age and FSM uptake. Blog writers were significantly more likely than their counterparts to say that they have a favourite writer (48.2% and 34.3%, respectively). There were also no significant differences in having a favourite writer and having a social networking site or a mobile phone.

### What a writer writes

Young people were also asked to picture someone who is a writer and to indicate what kinds of things he or she writes. *Figure 3* shows that almost three-quarters of young people believed that a writer writes short stories or books, followed by poems, plays/screenplays, reviews and letters. Technology-based types of writing, and the perhaps more modern types of writing, such as on a networking site, instant messages or on a blog, were the least frequently indicated formats that young people believe a writer writes.

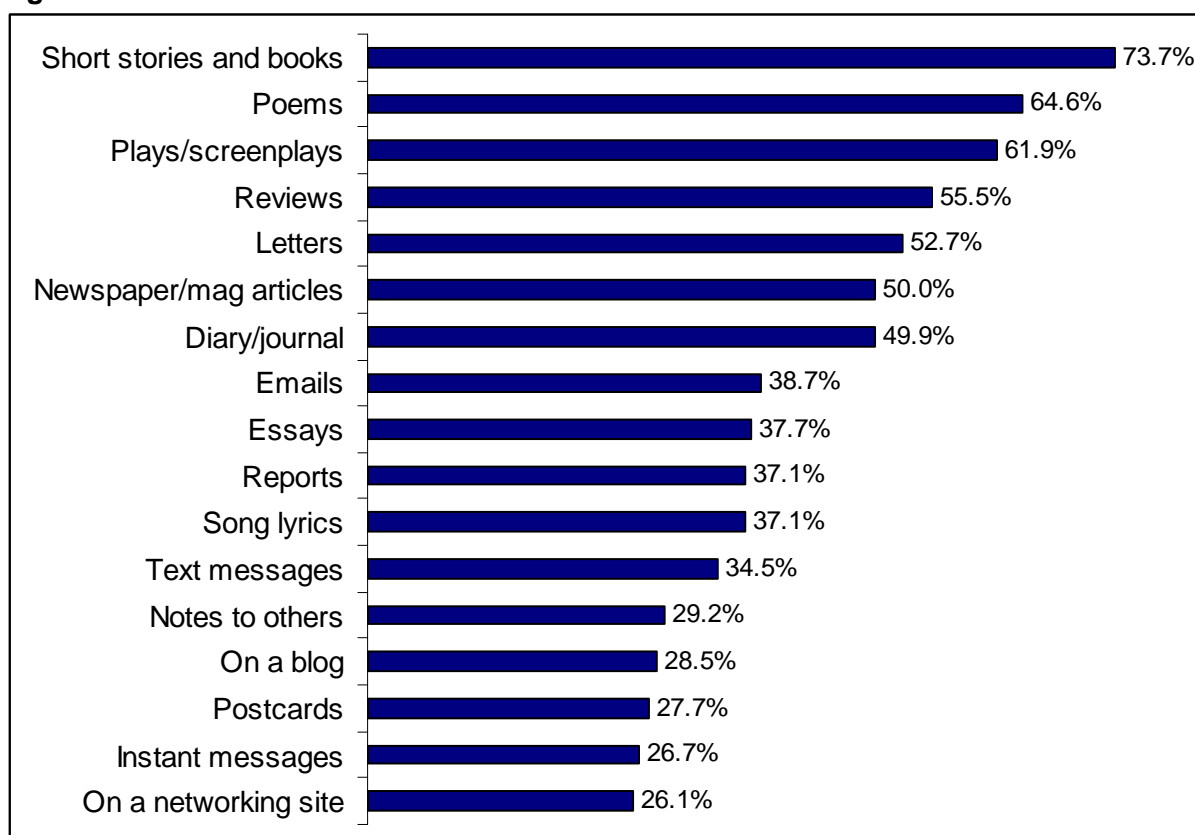
There were no significant differences in terms of gender, age and FSM uptake in young people's view of what a writer writes. Similarly, there were no significant differences in perceptions of what a writer writes and mobile phone use, writing on a blog or having a social networking site profile. One possible reason for this perception relates to the word 'writer'. It is possible that when answering the question of what types of formats a writer writes, young people thought about a professional writer, such as an author, rather than more generally about a person who writes.

### Characteristics of a writer

In addition to the types of formats a writer writes, young people were asked what they believe the characteristics of a writer are. *Figure 4* shows that two-thirds of young people believed that a writer is creative and intelligent. Nearly half of young people also believed that a writer is someone who will do well in life. Only a fifth of young people thought that a writer is someone who doesn't have any friends and who is boring.

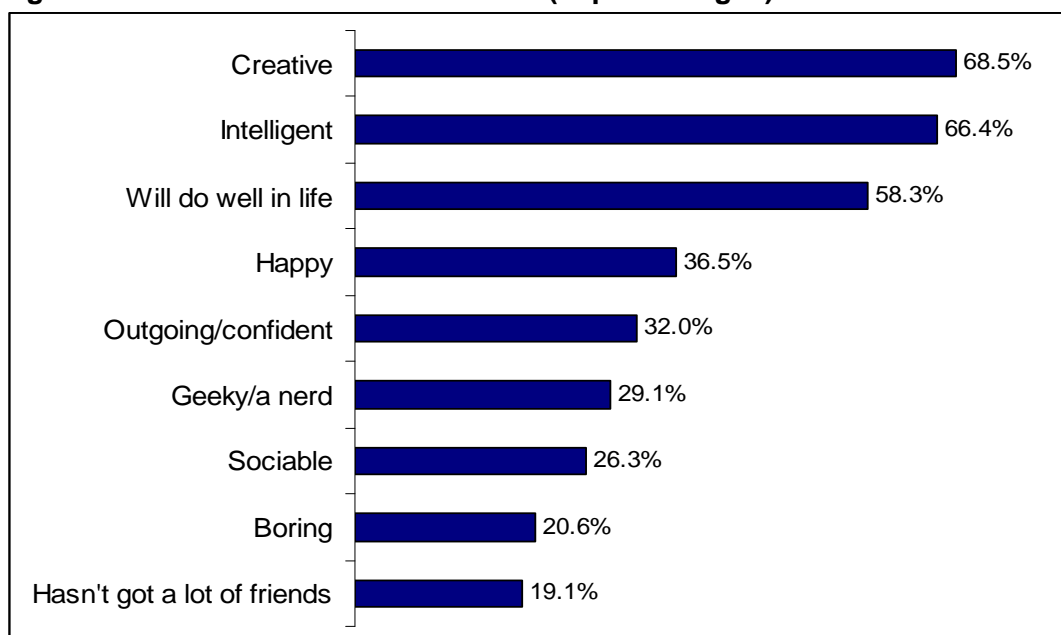
Girls tend to view writers more favourably than boys. While both boys and girls indicated that a writer is creative and intelligent, more girls than boys believed this (see *Table 8*). By contrast, more boys than girls believed that a writer is boring and geeky.

**Figure 3: What a writer writes**



(Base = 3001 pupils. More than one answer was possible, so percentages do not sum to 100)

**Figure 4: A writer is someone who is... (in percentages)**



(Base = 3001 pupils. More than one answer was possible, so percentages do not sum to 100)

**Table 8: Agreement with statements about writers by young people's demographic background and technology use**

	<i>Creative</i>	<i>Intelligent</i>	<i>Will do well in life</i>	<i>Happy</i>	<i>Outgoing/ confident</i>	<i>Geeky/a nerd</i>	<i>Sociable</i>	<i>Boring</i>	<i>Hasn't got a lot of friends</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Boys (N =1446 )	<b>62.4</b>	<b>62.1</b>	57.3	34.8	28.1	<b>36.4</b>	24.3	<b>27.3</b>	20.1
Girls (N = 1528)	<b>74.7</b>	<b>70.8</b>	59.4	38.1	33.8	<b>26.0</b>	28.3	<b>15.4</b>	18.1
KS2 (N = 712)	<b>71.5</b>	<b>69.6</b>	59.1	38.0	<b>34.4</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>17.7</b>
KS3 (N = 1672)	<b>59.8</b>	<b>60.0</b>	57.2	32.9	<b>27.3</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>18.3</b>
KS4 (N = 540)	<b>68.9</b>	<b>67.3</b>	58.2	36.4	29.7	<b>31.6</b>	<b>27.2</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>24.1</b>
FSM (N = 590)	68.8	67.0	58.4	36.7	30.4	32.6	26.9	21.7	19.4
Non-FSM (N = 2196)	68.1	66.1	58.3	36.4	28.8	31.7	26.0	19.9	18.9
Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)	68.8	69.4	58.5	36.6	29.7	32.4	26.5	21.2	19.0
Non-mobile phone owners (N = 541)	68.3	67.8	58.3	36.6	28.9	31.8	26.5	20.6	19.3
SNS Users (N = 1680)	<b>75.0</b>	<b>69.9</b>	59.7	39.2	33.3	<b>25.4</b>	27.4	<b>15.7</b>	18.2
Non-SNS users (N = 1310)	<b>62.8</b>	<b>61.7</b>	56.4	35.6	27.9	<b>36.3</b>	25.5	<b>27.3</b>	19.9
Blog owners (N = 720)	<b>74.3</b>	<b>70.2</b>	60.1	37.9	33.0	<b>26.8</b>	26.9	<b>15.7</b>	18.8
Non-blog owners (N = 2160)	<b>63.6</b>	<b>62.1</b>	57.4	35.3	28.1	<b>35.9</b>	26.0	<b>26.9</b>	19.3

*(Figures in bold indicate that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05)*

KS2 pupils generally have a more favourable view of writers than KS3 pupils, and to some degree KS4 pupils. Echoing dynamics seen earlier in attitudes towards writing, there is also a dip in views of writers at KS3, with views being more negative at this key stage than either at KS2 or KS4. For example, KS3 pupils are significantly more likely to view writers as boring or geeky than either KS2 or KS4 pupils.

There were no significant differences with respect to FSM uptake or mobile phone ownership and perceptions of writers. However, both young people who write on a blog and those who have a social networking profile hold a more favourable view of writers than their counterparts. While blog and social networking site users and their counterparts believe that writers are creative and intelligent, more blog writers and young people with a social networking profile believe this.

## Young people's use of computers and the perceived benefits of computers

- Young people use the computer more frequently for fun than they use it to write for schoolwork. Nearly half of young people use the computer to write for fun every day, compared with a fifth of young people who use it to write for homework every day.
- Girls use the computer more frequently to write for fun and for schoolwork compared with boys. KS4 pupils also use the computer more frequently to write both for fun and for schoolwork than their younger counterparts. Blog writers and young people with a social networking site profile use the computer more frequently to write both for fun and for schoolwork than young people who do not write on blogs or who do not have a profile on a social networking site.
- Generally, young people believe that computers are beneficial to their writing. Boys, non-FSM pupils, blog writers and young people with a profile on a social networking site have more positive attitudes towards computers than their counterparts.

Finally, considering that young people spend a lot of time with their computer, we were interested in exploring how they use their computer to write for fun and for schoolwork and whether they think that there are benefits to using a computer.

### Use of computers for fun and for schoolwork

*Table 9* shows that when asked how frequently they use a computer, nearly half of young people (49.6%) said that they use a computer every day to write for fun or for family/friends, followed by over two-fifths (22.2%) who use it to write for fun or for family/friends two to three times a week. Only a fifth (18%) of young people said that they use a computer every day for schoolwork, followed by over a quarter (27%) who use it two to three times a week to write for schoolwork.

Nearly a fifth of young people (16.8%) rarely or never used a computer to write for fun or for family/friends, while nearly a quarter of young people (23.5%) rarely or never used a computer to write for schoolwork. The prevalence of computers in writing for fun or for family/friends is contrary to US findings (e.g. Pew Internet, 2008) that reported that young people use a computer less when writing outside of school.

*Table 9* shows that girls were significantly more likely to use a computer to write for fun or for family/friends than were boys. Similarly, KS4 pupils were significantly more likely to use the computer frequently to write for fun or for family/friends than were KS2 and KS3 pupils. There was no significant difference between FSM pupils and their non-FSM counterparts in the frequency with which they used a computer to write for fun or for family/friends.

However, *Table 9* shows that young people who have a profile on a social networking site and those who are writing on a blog used the computer more frequently (every day or two to three times a week) to write for fun or for family/friends than young people who do not have a social networking profile or who do not write on a blog.

**Table 9: Writing for fun or for family/friends using a computer by young people's demographic background and technology use**

	<i>Every day</i>	<i>2 -3 times a week</i>	<i>Once a week</i>	<i>Once a month</i>	<i>Rarely or never</i>
	%	%	%	%	%
All young people (N = 3001)	49.6	22.2	16.8	7.7	3.7
Boys* (N = 1446 )	45.8	24.6	12.2	12.2	5.3
Girls* (N = 1528)	53.7	25.4	9.8	7.2	3.9
KS2* (N = 712)	43.6	24.7	19.0	9.8	3.8
KS3 (N = 1672)	49.9	22.3	16.5	7.7	3.6
KS4* (N = 540)	53.1	20.9	15.6	7.2	3.2
FSM (N = 590)	49.3	19.8	17.2	9.5	2.4
Non-FSM (N = 2196)	50.1	19.2	18.0	10.5	2.2
Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)	49.8	21.7	16.1	8.3	4.1
Non-mobile phone owners (N = 541)	49.9	23.8	16.9	8.7	0.7
SNS users* (N = 1680)	56.3	25.5	10.0	8.2	0
Non-SNS users* (N = 1310)	44.1	25.4	13.2	11.8	5.5
Blog owners* (N = 720)	55.9	25.1	13.3	5.7	0
Non-blog owners* (N = 2160)	44.7	26.9	13.5	11.2	3.7

(\* indicates that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05 between the categories)

Table 10 shows that girls were also more likely than boys to use the computer to write for schoolwork. Mirroring computer use to write for fun, KS4 school pupils were also more likely to use the computer frequently for schoolwork than were KS2 and KS3 pupils. These differences were statistically significant. There was also a significant relationship between computer use for schoolwork and FSM uptake, with FSM pupils using a computer to write for schoolwork less frequently than non-FSM pupils. This is despite the fact that there was no reported difference in access to computers at home between pupils who receive FSMs and those who do not (see Appendix B).

Again, blog writers and young people with a social networking site profile used the computer more frequently to write for schoolwork than young people who do not write on a blog, or young people who do not have a profile on a social networking site.



**Table 10: Writing for schoolwork using a computer by young people's demographic background and technology use**

	<i>Every day</i> %	<i>2 -3 times a week</i> %	<i>Once a week</i> %	<i>Once a month</i> %	<i>Rarely or never</i> %
<b>All young people (N = 3001)</b>	18.3	27.1	20.0	11.1	23.5
<b>Boys* (N = 1446)</b>	19.0	22.9	19.7	11.5	27.0
<b>Girls* (N = 1528)</b>	16.9	30.6	23.5	8.3	20.6
<b>KS2* (N = 712)</b>	16.6	29.1	21.6	10.8	21.9
<b>KS3 (N = 1672)</b>	18.8	28.7	22.9	8.5	21.1
<b>KS4* (N = 540)</b>	21.8	29.1	22.4	6.5	20.2
<b>FSM* (N = 590)</b>	16.7	27.5	22.1	11.1	22.6
<b>Non-FSM* (N = 2196)</b>	24.8	27.6	20.9	5.2	21.5
<b>Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)</b>	18.4	27.8	20.0	11.5	22.3
<b>Non-mobile phone owners (N = 541)</b>	17.9	28.2	18.5	11.0	24.7
<b>SNS users* (N = 1680)</b>	23.8	34.3	25.6	15.3	1.0
<b>Non-SNS users* (N = 1310)</b>	17.2	30.4	23.1	9.0	20.3
<b>Blog owners* (N = 720)</b>	23.0	34.7	26.8	14.6	0.9
<b>Non-blog owners* (N = 2160)</b>	18.3	28.4	23.0	10.4	19.9

(\* indicates that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05 between the categories)

## Perceived benefits of computers

Table 11 shows that young people generally believed that computers are beneficial to their writing. Nearly 9 in 10 of young people believed that a computer makes it easier for them to correct mistakes, while nearly 8 in 10 young people agreed that a computer allows one to present ideas clearly. Overall, around half of young people also believed that computers allow them to be more creative, allow them to concentrate more, and make them write more and more often.

These benefits supersede some negative aspects of computer use. For example, 3 in 10 young people believed that a computer makes one write too fast and encourages poor spelling and grammar.

Table 11: Agreement with statements about computers by young people's demographic background and technology use

	<i>Allows one to be more creative %</i>	<i>Easier to correct mistakes %</i>	<i>Concentrate more %</i>	<i>Use poor spelling and grammar %</i>	<i>Makes one write too fast %</i>	<i>Allows to present ideas clearly %</i>	<i>Makes one write more %</i>	<i>Makes one write more often %</i>
All young people (N = 3001)	59.9	88.6	47.9	25.3	31.1	75.8	55.3	57.3
Boys (N = 1446)	<b>63.1</b>	87.2	<b>54.0</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>36.4</b>	76.0	57.6	58.8
Girls (N = 1528)	<b>56.9</b>	89.7	<b>42.1</b>	<b>19.1</b>	<b>22.6</b>	75.8	53.4	56.2
KS2 (N = 712)	60.7	85.6	48.9	20.5	23.8	75.2	55.8	60.1
KS3 (N = 1672)	57.4	87.5	48.1	21.9	24.2	74.3	55.8	57.1
KS4 (N = 540)	59.7	89.8	47.5	22.8	27.7	76.2	55.4	56.7
FSM (N = 590)	<b>58.6</b>	87.1	<b>45.0</b>	25.8	32.2	76.1	59.7	<b>56.2</b>
Non-FSM (N = 2196)	<b>66.1</b>	90.0	<b>59.7</b>	21.3	31.4	79.3	54.6	<b>64.2</b>
Mobile phone owners (N = 2460)	59.9	89.1	47.3	26.3	31.3	75.2	55.3	56.8
Non-mobile phone owners (N = 541)	59.8	87.9	48.5	24.7	31.0	77.1	55.4	58.1
SNS users (N = 1680)	<b>63.7</b>	<b>90.4</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>17.3</b>	31.1	<b>83.4</b>	57.8	<b>61.3</b>
Non-SNS users (N = 1310)	<b>55.3</b>	<b>83.1</b>	<b>43.8</b>	<b>29.1</b>	31.4	<b>70.1</b>	53.0	<b>54.0</b>
Blog owners (N = 720)	<b>64.0</b>	<b>91.2</b>	<b>56.3</b>	<b>17.0</b>	31.8	<b>84.9</b>	57.2	<b>61.7</b>
Non-blog owners (N = 2160)	<b>54.8</b>	<b>85.6</b>	<b>44.7</b>	<b>30.3</b>	29.5	<b>70.3</b>	53.5	<b>53.1</b>

(figures in bold indicate that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05)

Although boys used the computer less frequently than girls to write for fun or for schoolwork, they had more positive attitudes towards computers than girls do. For example, boys were significantly more likely than girls to agree with the statements that computers allow one to be more creative and allow one to concentrate more. However, more boys than girls also agreed that computers make one use poor spelling and grammar and make one write too fast.

Similarly, pupils not entitled to free school meals had more positive attitudes towards computers than those who do receive free school meals. Non-FSM pupils were significantly more likely than FSM pupils to agree with the statements that computers allow one to be more creative, that they allow one to concentrate more and that they make one write more.

What is perhaps interesting is that there were no statistically significant relationships between any of the statements and age. This is despite the earlier finding that older pupils tended to use the computer more than their young counterparts to write for fun as well as for schoolwork.

Blog writers and young people with a social networking profile had more positive attitudes towards computers than their counterparts. For example, nearly twice as many non-blog writers than blog writers believed that a computer encourages poor spelling and grammar.

## What have we learned about young people and writing?

To sum up, this survey has provided us with some up-to-date insight into young people's attitudes towards writing.

### Young people and writing

Young people are ambivalent about their enjoyment of writing. Less than half of young people surveyed said that they enjoy writing. However, we also found that enjoyment is related to the type of writing being done. When young people were asked to rate their enjoyment of writing for family/friends and their enjoyment of writing for school separately, some interesting differences emerged, with two-thirds of young people enjoying writing for family/friends compared to half enjoying writing for school.

In addition to enjoyment of writing, we were keen to explore how young people rate themselves as writers and why they think so. When young people were asked how good they think they are at writing, we found that there was an almost equal split between those who said that they are either very good or good and those who felt that they could be better or were not very good.

Those who responded that they are a 'very good' or 'good' writer were then asked to select from a list the reasons why they think that they are good at writing. Most young people felt that they were a good writer because they use their imagination and know how to type and spell. By contrast, young people who didn't believe that they were good writers were more likely to emphasise the transcriptional aspects of writing in explaining their ability. For example, the most common reason why young people think that they are not good writers is that they are not very good at writing neatly, followed by them not enjoying writing very much and not being very good at spelling or at checking their work.

We also found that technology-based types of writing, such as text messages, instant messages and writing on social networking sites, were the types of formats that were engaged in most frequently at least once a month. Notes or answers in class or for homework were the most frequently written non-technology type of writing, followed by notes to other people.

Young people generally also hold ambivalent attitudes toward writing. For example, 49% of young people agreed that writing is boring, while 51% disagreed with this statement. However, most agreed that they enjoy writing more when they can choose the topic. Young people also tended to agree with statements that writing improves with practice. Echoing US research (Pew Internet, 2008), most young people also link writing with being successful in life. The majority of young people also believe that computers are beneficial to their writing, agreeing that a computer makes it easier for them to correct mistakes and allows them to present ideas clearly. Overall, over half of young people also believe that computers allow them to be more creative, allow them to concentrate more, make them write more and make them write more often.

Finally, when asked to picture a writer, most young people see writers in a favourable light, believing that someone who writes is creative, intelligent and will do well in life.

## Young bloggers and social networking site users

The growth of technology-based writing such as on blogs or on social networking sites, means that young people increasingly use written communication over any other. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that much of this writing is not considered 'proper writing' by teachers, while pupils themselves struggle to see technology-based writing as writing (e.g. Pew Internet, 2008). Yet, much of this writing is creative, designed to entertain the intended audience, and covers many of the assessment criteria that are attached to academic writing.

Some of the most interesting findings relate to young people who own blogs and young people who have a profile on a social networking site, echoing other recent findings about internet savvy young people or 'digital natives' (Youthnet, 2009). While frequently vilified in the media as 'dumbing down' children's and young people's literacy, our survey showed that both technologies offer a lot in terms of writing opportunities for young people. This finding is in line with other UK and international studies that are converging to show that texting using mobile phones and instant messages is not negatively related to literacy practice (Pew Internet, 2008; Plester et al., 2009; Tagliamonte and Denis, 2008).

So, how did writing on blogs and on social networking sites relate to young people's writing? Young people who write on a blog were more likely than young people who do not write on a blog to enjoy writing in general and to enjoy writing for family/friends in particular. Blog writers as well as young people with a profile on a social networking site also believed themselves to be better writers. Blog owners and young people with a social networking site profile also write more regularly and are more prolific writers than their counterparts. They also hold more positive attitudes towards writing, computer use and view writers more favourably.

However, it should be pointed out that we make no comment about causal relationships here. There may be different interpretations to the above findings. For example, instead of writing on blogs promoting enjoyment of writing or changing the frequency with which certain formats are written *per se*, it may just be the case that young people who have a blog have one because they enjoy writing and try to express their enjoyment through many different writing genres and media.

Similarly, we make no comment about the *content* of young people's writing. Having a mobile phone was not significantly related to enjoyment of writing, writing behaviour or attitudes towards writing in this survey. We should make it clear that we did not ask whether 'text speak' affects young people's writing in other areas. Text messaging is frequently blamed for the decline of young people's literacy practices. While this fear needs to be addressed, the opportunity to engage young people and make the school curriculum more interesting and relevant should not be lost.

Research has also shown that as long as young people understand when different forms of writing are appropriate, then texting and other technologies are linked positively with literacy achievement. For example, comparing exam papers from the past 25 years, Massey (2005) found that teenagers nowadays are indeed "ten times more likely to use non-standard English in written exams than in 1980, using colloquial words, informal phrases and text-messaging shorthand – such as m8 for 'mate', 2 instead of 'too' and u for 'you'". However, the same study also found that teenagers now are using far more complex sentence structures, a wider vocabulary and a more accurate use of capital letters, punctuation and spelling. They also type more quickly than any generation before them.

## The importance of gender

Boys' writing standards are a particular concern in the UK, with boys consistently lagging behind girls in their writing skills. Our survey shows that boys are lagging behind girls in more than just their writing skills. We found that boys do not enjoy writing as much as girls, either for

family/friends or for schoolwork. Boys are also more likely to rate themselves as not very good writers than girls and to emphasise the lack of technical skills when explaining their self-perceived ability. Boys also hold more negative attitudes towards writing. For example, boys are more likely than girls to agree with statements that writing is boring and that writing is more for girls than for boys. However, boys hold more positive attitudes towards computers, being more likely than girls to believe that computers are beneficial to writing.

Overall, boys are more likely than girls to believe that writing is simply something that must be done, rather than something that people enjoy doing. Perhaps one way this perception can be changed is by exploring a greater variety of possible writing formats. For example, technology-based formats, in the form of text messages, blogs or notes on a social networking site, feature strongly as a vehicle to encourage pupils to write more widely. By showing that websites, emails, blogs and networking sites were among the most commonly written formats outside of school, this study highlights the importance of technology in informing young people's writing choices.

There may still be a certain amount of caution held by teachers about the validity of the internet and online communication as writing materials, and also in some cases lack of knowledge and confidence in using these materials in their writer development work. Schools might like to consider how they can break down the barriers related to ICT and include it as part of their continuing professional development. This could include setting up systems to share knowledge of good websites, blogs, etc.

### **What's happening with KS3 pupils' enjoyment of writing and attitudes towards writing?**

Another interesting finding is the dip in enjoyment of writing, writing behaviour and attitudes towards writing at KS3. Generally, KS2 pupils enjoy writing, both for family/friends and for schoolwork. They write a variety of formats, mostly traditional forms, such as short stories, poems and letters. They hold positive attitudes towards writing and view writers in a favourable light. At KS3 these behaviours and attitudes plummet and turn negative, recovering again at KS4.

The reason for this dip in the present survey is unclear. Since this survey was cross-sectional and not longitudinal in design, we cannot say with certainty that our observations on KS3 pupils were not simply down to a particularly disaffected cohort of KS3 pupils.

However, the negative impact of transition from primary school to secondary school is well-documented and possibly a factor. That transitional time is frequently blamed for a similar drop in reading enjoyment and reading attitudes (e.g. Green, 1998, Clark and Foster, 2005) and for a drop in general school enjoyment and achievement (see Evangelou et al., 2009). In addition to transitional challenges, the fact that enjoyment of writing, behaviour and attitudes recover in KS4, implies that it may also be the KS3 writing curriculum that does not sufficiently engage, inspire or challenge students where writing is concerned.

Whether the reason for the dip at KS3 observed in the present study is due to the cohort of pupils used or part of the transitional problems from KS2 and KS3 needs to be explored in a further, longitudinal study.

### **Socio-economic background and young people's writing**

The relationship between enjoyment of writing, writing behaviour, attitudes towards writing and socio-economic status, assessed by proxy using free school meal uptake as an indicator, is a complex one.

While reading behaviour and attitudes are affected by socio-economic background (Clark and Akerman, 2006), pupils who receive FSM in the present study were not more or less likely than their more privileged counterparts to enjoy writing or to write regularly. There was also no relationship between socio-economic background and enjoyment of writing, writing behaviour, linking writing to success, views of writers, computer use or attitudes towards computers.

However, there was a significant relationship between FSM uptake and self-reported writing ability. Pupils who receive FSM were more likely to rate themselves as struggling writers than pupils who are not entitled to FSM. This finding is consistent with historical national attainment figures (DCSF, 2008b) that show that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle with their writing more than pupils from more privileged ones. These differences in confidence echo findings by Kellet and Dar (2007, p viii) who found that,

*An important self-development strategy uncovered in the children's reports was the need to 'practise your private confidence' before you could develop 'public confidence'. Children identified reading aloud and writing as activities requiring 'public confidence', and needed a lot of 'private' practice. A striking characteristic of children from affluent backgrounds was how easy it was for them to access opportunities for 'private confidence' building whereas children from low-income backgrounds had little, if any, opportunity for this.*

There were also some differences in the types of writing done, with FSM pupils saying that they write letters, song lyrics, in a diary/journal, poems, newspaper/magazine articles and plays/screenplays more frequently at least once a month than non-FSM pupils. There were also two significant differences in attitudes towards writing, with more FSM pupils agreeing with the statements that girls enjoy writing more than boys do and that they have trouble deciding what to write.

The complex relationship between writing and socio-economic background needs to be explored in more detail in future research.

## Policy implications

Improving standards in, and enjoyment of, writing among young people, has long been a significant challenge for policy makers. Test scores in writing have always been below those in reading, and the most recent set of national results again show a lack of improvement. Within this report are a number of findings that could have implications for the way in which writing policy is developed. These findings fall broadly into two categories: the more 'predictable' findings, and those that were a surprise.

The relationship between gender and both confidence in and enjoyment of writing is in line with most studies into other aspects of literacy. Girls tend to have both higher attainment and more positive attitudes towards learning. This long-standing problem has led the government to make concerted efforts in policy and practice to raise the achievement of boys. The only area of this study where boys responded more positively than girls was in their attitudes towards computers. Following reviews of both the primary and secondary curriculum, computers are set to be used more extensively in the curriculum and it will be interesting to see if this has any impact on writing attainment among boys.

A study by the National Literacy Trust in 2008 (Clark, Osborne and Akerman, 2008), which looked at young people's self-perceptions as readers, found that in general children in KS2 held more positive attitudes to reading than their older peers – something that appears frequently in



educational studies. This finding was again replicated here, suggesting a drop off in attitudes to learning as children leave primary school.

The transition from primary to secondary school is a difficult time for many young people, and the movement from one classroom to a subject-based environment can be difficult. Providing a degree of consistency between primary and secondary can help with this difficult stage in education. There have been suggestions that a piece of creative writing that children begin at the end of KS2 and carry forward into KS3 would ease this process. This is certainly an option that should be explored, although any work would have to be geared towards enjoyment, rather than something that was overly assessed.

Surprisingly, the report found that young people's attitudes to writing are lowest in KS3. In fact enjoyment, behaviour and attitude were all lowest in KS3. There is a need for more studies, including longitudinal work, to confirm this trend but these results pose some important questions for policy makers. The results could be related to the transition between primary and secondary, something that would further enhance the case for a piece of work to be shared across the two stages.

Furthermore, KS3 pupils are at an age where they are no longer young children but still do not have the freedoms of slightly older teenagers. The study found that enjoyment of writing is strongly linked to the type of writing being done. Older pupils have more social freedoms, will generally have more advanced skills and may, therefore, enjoy more frequent and enjoyable exchanges of writing online. The rise in instant messaging between KS3 and KS4, and the similar rise in those who keep a diary, may reflect this. Confidence brought on by higher skills, coupled with enjoyment around having more freedom, could be the reason KS4 pupils have more positive attitudes to reading.

Rectifying the KS3 issues is a difficult challenge for policy makers. There have often been calls for the education system to validate wider forms of reading, and to embrace the interests of young people. Given the strong links between enjoyment and attitudes, this is something that should be considered in KS3. The areas of writing that fewest children take part in at KS3: writing song lyrics, writing a diary, poetry and letters, are all activities that could be encouraged in school. If both older and younger children enjoy these activities then promoting them in the classroom to KS3 children could help sustain young people's interest in writing.

Perhaps the most worrying problem highlighted in the report may have a similar solution in terms of working alongside the interests of young people. There was no relationship found between the enjoyment of writing of young people on FSM and those who were not. However, children eligible for FSM were significantly less confident about their own writing ability than other children. While this correlates with national attainment figures it is worrying. Effectively, enjoyment is not translating into high confidence or high attainment.

Children on FSM also said they were more likely to be writing journals, song lyrics, poems and newspaper articles once a month than non-FSM pupils. The combination of low attitudes and an interest in the above forms of writing would suggest a similar solution to the problems KS3 pupils pose for policy makers.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this survey has provided us with some up-to-date insight into young people's attitudes towards writing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it showed that young people enjoy writing for family/friends more than they enjoy writing for schoolwork. Young people write technology-based materials, such as text and instant messages, most frequently in a month. Notes in

classroom/for homework and notes to other people were the most frequently written non-technology type of formats. Young people are ambivalent in their attitudes towards writing. They agree with statements such as that writing is more fun when they can choose the topics, that it is easier to read than to write and that their writing improves with practice. They also tend to disagree with the statement that they wish they had more time to write in school and are ambivalent as to whether writing is boring.

Overall, it is paramount that the school curriculum reflects and utilises writing forms that young people enjoy and engage with in order to demonstrate that writing is more than a compulsory task: it is an essential life skill. Attitudes towards writing and types of writing will be explored in more detail in a qualitative study in 2010 by 'Everybody Writes', a writing project run by Booktrust and the National Literacy Trust. Everybody Writes offers classroom teachers innovative ideas and practical resources to get primary pupils and secondary students excited about writing.

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## Appendix A: Writing attitudes questionnaire

Hello! This is a survey about the kinds of writing you do. Please read each question carefully. You don't have to answer a question if you don't want to. But the more questions you answer honestly, the more likely it is that we can use your answers to improve what we do here at the National Literacy Trust. Don't worry, this is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. This survey is confidential, which means that your responses will not be seen by anyone at your school and your name is not required. If you need help filling out this questionnaire, please ask the person helping your class. Please start with the survey now by clicking on the Continue button below.

Are you:

1. Boy
2. Girl

What school do you go to?

How old are you?

1. 8
2. 9
3. 10
4. 11
5. 12
6. 13
7. 14
8. 15
9. 16
10. 17

Do you receive free school meals?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Which of the following do you have...

1. A mobile phone
2. A desktop/laptop
3. Access to a desktop/laptop at home
4. A profile on a social networking site (e.g. Bebo, Facebook)
5. A blog
6. A personal website

Do you write regularly?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Do you enjoy writing?

1. Very much
2. Quite a lot
3. Not a lot
4. Not at all

How often do you write the following kinds of things? Part 1

	At least once a day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Rarely	Never
A diary/journal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On a blog	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Essays	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Text messages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notes or answers in class/for homework	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Song lyrics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emails	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plays/screenplays	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Instant messages (such as AIM, MSN/Windows Live Messenger, Skype)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

And again, how often do you write the following kinds of things?

	At least once a day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Rarely	Never
Notes to other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Postcards to other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short stories/fiction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newspaper or magazine stories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reviews (such as book or film reviews)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reports (such as science reports)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On a social networking site (such as Bebo, MySpace, Facebook)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How good do you think you are at writing?

1. Very good
2. Good
3. Could be better
4. Not very good
5. Don't know

Why do you think you are good at writing? (Tick as many as you like)

1. I use my imagination
2. I try things out
3. I use punctuation correctly
4. I can express myself
5. I check my work
6. I write neatly
7. Other people have told me that I am good
8. I know how to spell
9. I know how to type
10. I read a lot
11. I write a lot
12. I talk about my writing
13. I enjoy writing
14. I don't know
15. Other

What do you enjoy writing the MOST? (Tick ONE only)

1. A diary/journal
2. On a blog
3. Essays
4. Text messages
5. Notes or answers in class/for homework
6. Poems
7. Song lyrics
8. Emails
9. Plays/screenplays
10. Instant messages (such as AIM, MSN/Windows Live Messenger, Skype)
11. Letters
12. Notes to other people
13. Postcards to other people
14. Short stories/fiction
15. Newspapers or magazine stories
16. Reviews (such as book or film reviews)
17. Reports (such as science reports)
18. On a social networking site (such as Bebo, MySpace, Facebook)
19. Other

Why do you think you are not very good at writing or think you could be better? (Tick as many as you like)

1. I am not very good at using my imagination
2. I am not very good at trying things out
3. I cannot express myself clearly
4. I am not very good at using punctuation correctly
5. I am not very good at checking my work
6. I am not very good at writing neatly
7. Other people have told me that I am not very good
8. I am not very good at spelling
9. I am not very good at typing
10. I don't read a lot
11. I don't write a lot
12. I don't talk about my writing
13. I don't enjoy writing
14. I don't know
15. Other

Do you agree or disagree with each of these:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Writing is boring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I practise my writing improves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compared to other students I am a good writer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I wish I had more time to write at school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Girls enjoy writing more than boys do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like what I write	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A pupil who writes well gets better marks than someone who doesn't	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have trouble deciding what to write	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing is more fun when I can choose a topic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is easier to read than to write	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How important do you think writing is to be successful in life?

1. Very important
2. Important
3. Not very important
4. Not at all important
5. Don't know

Picture a person who is a writer. What kinds of things does he or she write? (Tick as many as you like)

1. A diary/journal
2. On a blog
3. Essays
4. Text messages
5. Notes or answers in class/for homework
6. Poems
7. Song lyrics
8. Emails
9. Plays/screenplays
10. Instant messages (such as AIM, MSN/Windows Live Messenger, Skype)
11. Letters
12. Notes to other people
13. Postcards to other people
14. Stories and books (fiction/non-fiction)
15. Newspaper or magazine stories
16. Reviews (such as book or film reviews)
17. Reports (such as science reports)
18. On a social networking site (such as Bebo, MySpace, Facebook)
19. Any other writing that we haven't listed?



Do you think writing is for people who are: (Tick as many as you like)

1. Happy
2. Sociable
3. Geeky/nerds
4. Outgoing/confident
5. Hasn't got lots of friends
6. Intelligent
7. Creative
8. Someone who will do well in life
9. Boring
10. Other

What do you think makes a person a good writer? (Tick as many as you like)

1. Uses his/her imagination
2. Tries things out
3. Uses his/her punctuation correctly
4. Checks his/her work
5. Writes neatly
6. Knows how to spell
7. Knows how to type
8. Reads a lot
9. Writes a lot
10. Talks about his/her writing
11. Enjoys writing
12. I don't know
13. Anything else?

Which of these is the MOST important to be a good writer? (Tick ONE only)

1. Uses his/her imagination
2. Tries things out
3. Uses his/her punctuation correctly
4. Checks his/her work
5. Writes neatly
6. Knows how to spell
7. Knows how to type
8. Reads a lot
9. Writes a lot
10. Talks about his/her writing
11. Enjoys writing
12. I don't know
13. Other

Do you have a favourite writer?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Is your favourite writer a:

1. Author
2. Songwriter
3. Poet
4. Film writer
5. Journalist
6. Blogger
7. Other

How often do you use a computer?

	Every day	2-3 times a week	Once a week	Once a month	Rarely	Never
To write for fun or for family and friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To write for your schoolwork	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you agree or disagree that using a computer for writing:

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
Allows you to be more creative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes it easier for you to correct your mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allows you to concentrate more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes you use poor spelling and grammar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes you write too fast and be careless	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allows you to present ideas clearly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes you write more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes you write more often	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How much do you enjoy:

	A lot	Some	Not much	Not at all
The writing you do for fun or for family and friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The writing you do for school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Which of these kinds of writing do you wish you could do MORE of at school? (Tick as many as you like)

1. A diary/journal
2. On a blog
3. Essays
4. Text messages
5. Notes or answers in class/for school
6. Poems
7. Song lyrics
8. Emails
9. Plays/screenplays
10. Instant messages (such as AIM, MSN/Windows Live Messenger, Skype)
11. Letters
12. Notes to other people

13. Postcards to other people
14. Short stories/fiction
15. Newspapers or magazine stories
16. Reviews (such as book or film reviews)
17. Reports (such as science reports)
18. On a social networking site (such as Bebo, MySpace, Facebook)
19. Any other writing we haven't listed?

Which of these best describes you?

1. White - British
2. White - Irish
3. White - Traveller of Irish heritage
4. White - Romany or Gypsy
5. White - any other white background
6. Mixed - White and Black Caribbean
7. Mixed - White and Black African
8. Mixed - White and Asian
9. Mixed - any other mixed-race background
10. Asian or Asian British - Indian
11. Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
12. Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
13. Asian or Asian British - Chinese
14. Asian or Asian British - any other Asian background
15. Black or Black British - Caribbean
16. Black or Black British - African
17. Black or Black British - any other Black background
18. Other

## Appendix B: Technology and young people's background characteristics

More girls than boys and more secondary than primary school pupils have mobile phones, a profile on a social networking site or a blog. More secondary than primary school pupils also have a computer or have access to one at home. There was no relationship between FSM uptake and owning a mobile phone, computer, social networking profile or blog.

*Table B1* outlines the background characteristics of young people who own a mobile phone, who own or have access to a computer, who have a profile on a social networking site (SNS) and who have a blog. It shows that significantly more girls than boys have a mobile phone, a profile on a social networking site and a blog.

The biggest differences exist between primary school and secondary school pupils, with secondary school pupils being significantly more likely to have all four technologies. Having a social networking site profile shows the biggest difference in terms of age, with nearly a third of primary school pupils reporting that they have profile on a social networking site compared with nearly two-thirds of secondary pupils. This may be at least partly explained by some social networking sites having a minimum age requirement. For example, Facebook and Bebo do not permit young people younger than 13 to register. However, there are a number of social networking sites now that, given parental consent, target the younger market; This may explain the high number of primary KS2 pupils who say that they have a social networking site profile.

By contrast, although more young people who do not get free school meals say that they have all four technologies than do young people who get free school meals, none of these differences was statistically significant.

**Table B1: Technology and young people's demographic background**

	<i>Mobile phone</i> (N = 2460) %	<i>Computer</i> (N = 2340) %	<i>SNS</i> (N = 1680) %	<i>Blog</i> (N = 720) %
<b>Boys (N = 1446)</b>	<b>75.4</b>	75.6	<b>50.7</b>	<b>17.7</b>
<b>Girls (N = 1528)</b>	<b>87.9</b>	79.8	<b>64.0</b>	<b>32.6</b>
<b>KS2 (N = 712)</b>	<b>63.4</b>	<b>66.3</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>17.4</b>
<b>KS3 (N = 1672)</b>	<b>87.5</b>	<b>80.7</b>	<b>67.4</b>	<b>28.9</b>
<b>KS4 (N = 540)</b>	<b>88.0</b>	81.5	68.4	31.0
<b>FSM (N = 590)</b>	79.1	75.2	52.5	22.9
<b>Non-FSM (N = 2196)</b>	<b>83.7</b>	<b>79.9</b>	<b>57.7</b>	<b>26.2</b>

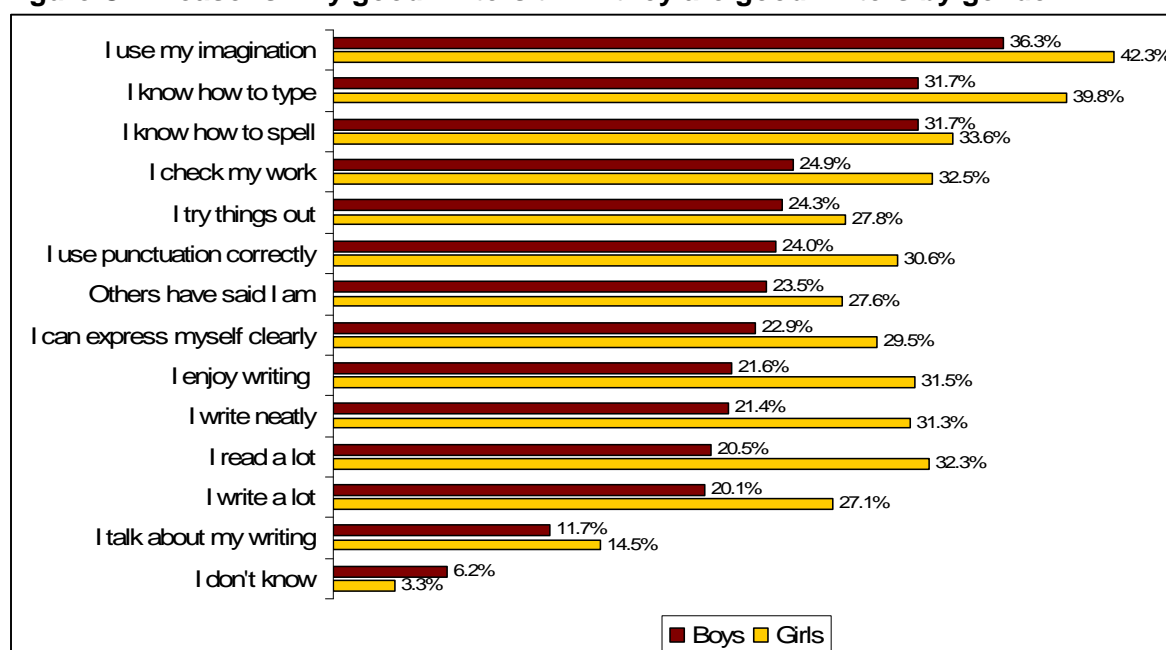
(Figures in bold indicate that there were statistically significant differences at the conventional significance level of 0.05 between the categories)

## Appendix C: Reasons for writing ability by demographic background

Figure C1 shows that there were numerous differences between boys and girls in the reasons they gave for why they think they are a good writer. A significantly greater proportion of girls than boys said that they are good writers because they use their imagination, they know how to use punctuation correctly, they can express themselves clearly, they check their work and they write neatly. A greater proportion of girls than boys also said that they are good writers because they know how to type, they read a lot, they write a lot, and they enjoy writing. There were no significant differences with regard to the following possible reasons: because I like trying things out, because someone told me that I am a good writer, because I know how to spell, because I talk about my writing.

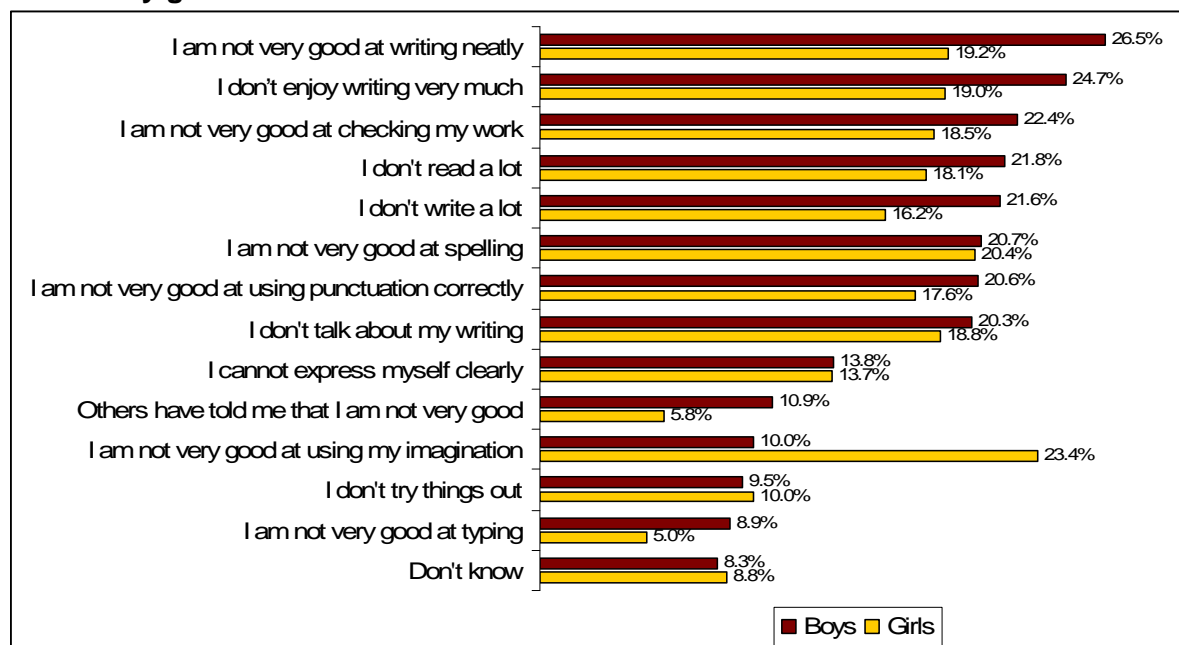
As shown in Figure C2, there were significant differences between boys and girls in the reasons they chose. A significantly greater proportion of boys than girls said that they are not very good writers because they are not very good at writing neatly, because people have told them that they are not very good writers, because they are not very good at typing, because they don't write a lot and because they don't enjoy writing. A significantly greater proportion of girls than boys, on the other hand, said that they are not very good at using their imagination. There were no significant gender differences with respect to the following reasons: I am not very good at trying things out, I am not very good at expressing myself clearly, I am not very good at using punctuation correctly, I am not very good at checking my work, I am not very good at spelling, I don't read a lot, I don't talk about my writing, and don't know.

**Figure C1: Reasons why good writers think they are good writers by gender**



(Based on N = 1,469. More than one answer was possible, so percentages do not sum to 100)

**Figure C2: Reasons why young people who do not think of themselves as good writers think so by gender**



(Based on N = 1,265. More than one answer was possible, so percentages do not sum to 100)

## FSM uptake

Looking at the responses of young people who indicated that they were 'very good' or 'good' writers, there was only one statistically significant difference in terms of FSM uptake. A significantly greater proportion of non-FSM pupils (42.1%) than FSM pupils (33.4%) indicated that they are a good writer because they use their imagination. Responses to the remaining possible reasons showed no relationship to FSM uptake.

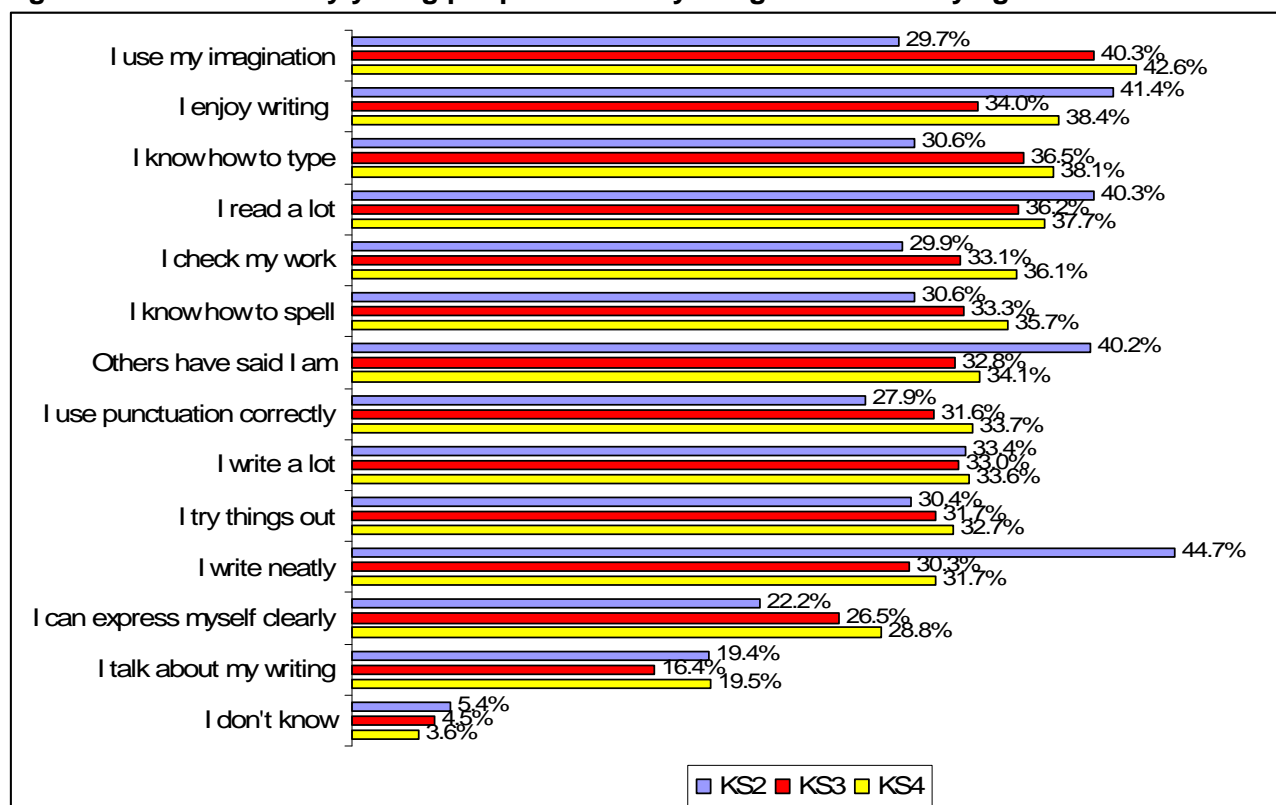
Similarly, there was only one statistically significant difference in terms of FSM when young people who did not consider themselves to be good writers were asked to provide the reasons for their self-reported ability. A significantly greater proportion of FSM pupils (12.0%) than non-FSM pupils (7.2%) said that they think that they are not very good writers because other people have told them that they are not. Responses to the remaining possible reasons showed no relationship to FSM uptake.

## Age

Figure C3 shows that a significantly greater proportion of KS4 than KS3 and KS2 pupils believed that they are good writers because they use their imagination, they know how to use punctuation correctly, they can express themselves clearly and they check their work. By contrast, significantly more KS2 than KS3 and KS4 pupils say that they are a good writer because they write neatly.

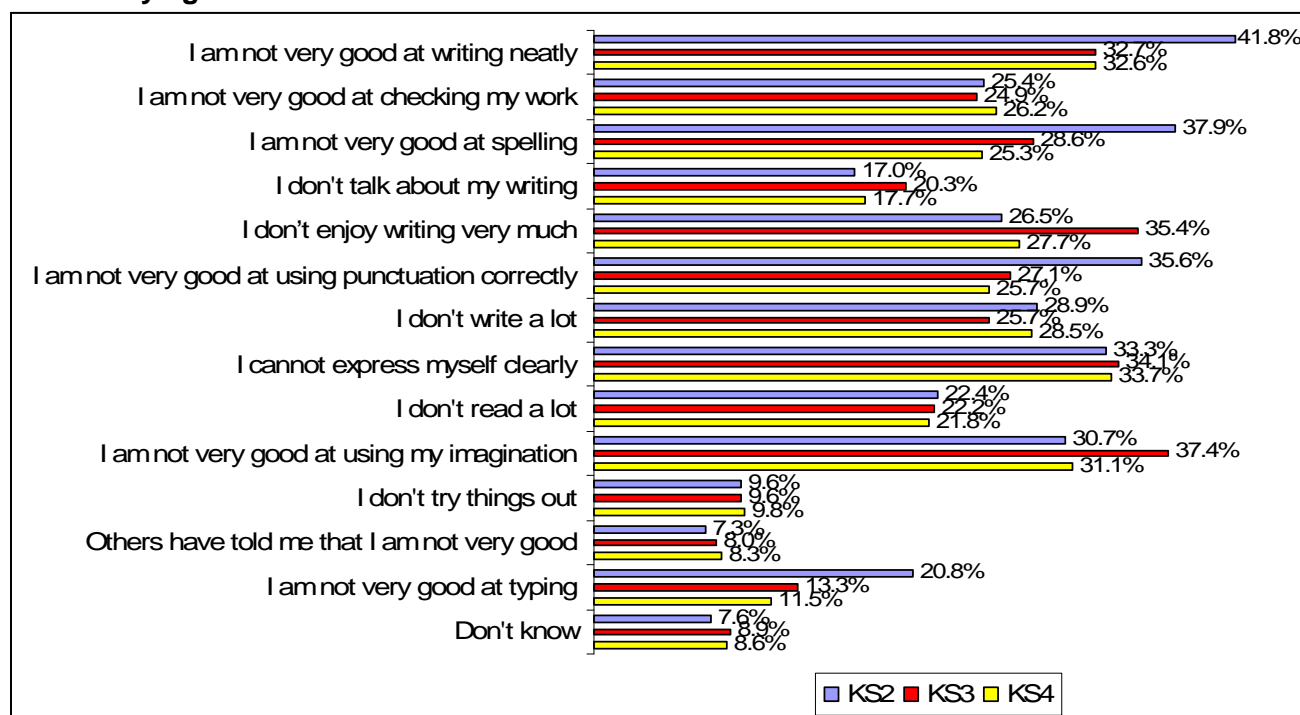
There were fewer differences between the key stages in the reasons pupils who didn't think that they were good writers offered for their self-reported ability (see Figure C4). Significantly more KS3 and KS4 pupils than KS2 pupils believed that they are not very good writers because they do not use their imagination, because they don't write a lot and because they don't enjoy writing. Conversely, more KS2 than KS3 and KS4 pupils said that they are not very good writers because they are not very good at spelling, punctuation and typing. KS2 pupils were also more likely than older pupils to say that they are not very good writers because they don't write neatly.

**Figure C3: Reasons why young people think they are good writers by age**



(Based on N = 1,469. More than one answer was possible, so percentages do not sum to 100)

**Figure C4: Reasons why young people who do not think of themselves as good writers think so by age**



(Based on N = 1,265. More than one answer was possible, so percentages do not sum to 100)

## Appendix D: Writing frequency of 18 types of format for whole sample

**Table D1: Frequency of various types of writing in percentages for the sample as a whole**

	At least once a day %	At least once a week %	At least once a month %	Rarely %	Never %
A diary/journal	11.2	10.5	7.7	25.0	45.6
On a blog	9.3	12.3	9.9	22.4	46.1
Essays	2.8	9.6	31.0	32.8	23.8
Text messages	62.1	15.8	4.0	8.5	9.6
Notes or answers in class/for homework	36.7	33.0	7.3	13.6	9.3
Poems	4.8	9.2	18.2	40.7	27.1
Song lyrics	7.7	11.1	11.1	27.0	43.1
Emails	25.7	25.6	15.7	15.7	17.4
Plays/screenplays	6.3	7.5	10.4	32.9	42.8
Instant messages	51.9	15.7	5.5	8.5	18.4
Letters	4.6	8.4	18.8	42.1	26.1
Notes to other people	16.4	21.8	14.1	30.1	17.6
Postcards	2.5	3.1	11.1	54.0	29.3
Short stories	6.0	15.4	27.2	31.8	19.6
Newspaper or magazine stories	7.2	10.7	13.0	34.9	34.2
Reviews	4.6	8.9	15.8	39.4	31.2
Reports	3.4	10.5	18.8	36.9	30.3
On a social networking site	38.7	17.8	6.0	9.4	28.2